FROM PLACE TO PLACE

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FROM PLACE TO PLACE

THE WORKS OF

IRVIN S. COBB

FROM PLACE TO PLACE

THE REVIEW OF REVIEWS CORPORATION
Publishers
NEW YORK
PUBLISHED BY ARRANGEMENT WITH GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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TO

CHARLES R. FLINT, Esq.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	The Gallowsmith	11
II	The Broken Shoelace	55
III	Boys Will Be Boys	96
IV	The Luck Piece	156
V	Quality Folks	206
VI	John J. Coincidence	259
VII	When August the Second wrs April the First	302
VIII	Hoodwinked	332
IX	The Bull Called Emily	382

FROM PLACE TO PLACE

CHAPTER I

THE GALLOWSMITH

THIS man that I have it in mind to write about was, at the time of which I write, an elderly man, getting well along toward sixty-five. He was tall and slightly stooped, with long arms, and big, gnarled, competent-looking hands, which smelled of yellow laundry soap, and had huge, tarnished nails on the fingers. He had mild, pale eyes, a light blue as to colour, with heavy sacs under them, and whitish whiskers, spindly and thin, like some sort of second-growth, which were so cut as to enclose his lower face in a nappy fringe, extending from ear to ear under his chin. He suffered from a chronic heart affection, and this gave to his skin a pronounced and unhealthy pallor. He was neat and prim in his personal habits, kind to dumb animals, and tolerant of small children. He was inclined to be miserly; certainly in money matters he was most prudent and saving. He had the air about him of being lonely. His name was Tobias Dramm. In the town where

he lived he was commonly known as Uncle Tobe Dramm. By profession he was a public hangman. You might call him a gallowsmith. He hanged men for hire.

So far as the available records show, this Tobias Dramm was the only man of his calling on this continent. In himself he constituted a specialty and a monopoly. The fact that he had no competition did not make him careless in the pursuit of his calling. On the contrary, it made him precise and painstaking. As one occupying a unique position, he realized that he had a reputation to sustain, and capably he sustained it. In the Western Hemisphere he was, in the trade he followed, the nearest modern approach to the paid executioners of olden times in France who went, each of them, by the name of the city or province wherein he was stationed, to do torturing and maiming and killing in the gracious name of the king.

A generous government, committed to a belief in the efficacy of capital punishment, paid Tobias Dramm at the rate of seventy-five dollars a head for hanging offenders convicted of the hanging crime, which was murder. He averaged about four hangings every three months or, say, about nine hundred dollars a year—all clear money.

The manner of Mr. Dramm's having entered upon the practise of this somewhat grisly trade makes in itself a little tale. He was a lifelong citizen of the town of Chickaloosa,

down in the Southwest, where there stood a State penitentiary, and where, during the period of which I am speaking, the Federal authorities sent for confinement and punishment the criminal sweepings of half a score of States and Territories. This was before the government put up prisons of its own, and while still it parcelled out its human liabilities among State-owned institutions, paying so much apiece for their keep. When the government first began shipping a share of its felons to Chickaloosa, there came along, in one clanking caravan of shackled malefactors, a half-breed, part Mexican and the rest of him Indian, who had robbed a territorial post-office and incidentally murdered the post-master thereof. Wherefore this half-breed was under sentence to expiate his greater misdeed on a given date, between the hours of sunrise and sunset, and after a duly prescribed manner, namely: by being hanged by the neck until he was dead.

At once a difficulty and a complication arose. The warden of the penitentiary at Chickaloosa was perfectly agreeable to the idea of keeping and caring for those felonious wards of the government who were put in his custody to serve terms of imprisonment, holding that such disciplinary measures fell within the scope of his sworn duty. But when it came to the issue of hanging any one of them, he drew the line most firmly. As he pointed out, he

was not a government agent. He derived his authority and drew his salary not from Washington, D. C., but from a State capital several hundreds of miles removed from Washington. Moreover, he was a zealous believer in the principle of State sovereignty. As a soldier of the late Southern Confederacy, he had fought four years to establish that doctrine. Conceded, that the cause for which he fought had been defeated; nevertheless his views upon the subject remained fixed and permanent. He had plenty of disagreeable jobs to do without stringing up bad men for Uncle Sam; such was the attitude the warden took. The sheriff of the county of which Chickaloosa was the county-seat, likewise refused to have a hand in the impending affair, holding it—and perhaps very properly—to be no direct concern of his, either officially or personally.

Now the government very much wanted the hybrid hanged. The government had been put to considerable trouble and no small expense to catch him and try him and convict him and transport him to the place where he was at present confined. Day and date for the execution of the law's judgment having been fixed, a scandal and possibly a legal tangle would ensue were there delay in the premises. It was reported that a full pardon had been offered to a long-term convict on condition that he carry out the court's mandate upon the body of the condemned mongrel, and that he had

refused, even though the price were freedom for himself.

In this serious emergency, a volunteer in the person of Tobias Dramm came forward. Until then he had been an inconspicuous unit in the life of the community. He was a live-stock dealer on a small scale, making his headquarters at one of the town livery stables. He was a person of steady habits, with a reputation for sobriety and frugality among his neighbours. The government, so to speak, jumped at the chance. Without delay, his offer was accepted. There was no prolonged haggling over terms, either. He himself fixed the cost of the job at seventy-five dollars; this figure to include supervision of the erection of the gallows, testing of the apparatus, and the actual operation itself.

So, on the appointed day, at a certain hour, to wit, a quarter past six o'clock in the morning, just outside the prison walls, and in the presence of the proper and ordained number of witnesses, Uncle Tobe, with a grave, untroubled face, and hands which neither fumbled nor trembled, tied up the doomed felon and hooded his head in a black-cloth bag, and fitted a noose about his neck. The drop fell at eighteen minutes past the hour. Fourteen minutes later, following brief tests of heart and pulse, the two attending physicians agreed that the half-breed was quite satisfactorily defunct. They likewise coincided in the opinion

that the hanging had been conducted with neatness, and with swiftness, and with the least possible amount of physical suffering for the deceased. One of the doctors went so far as to congratulate Mr. Dramm upon the tidiness of his handicraft. He told him that in all his experience he had never seen a hanging pass off more smoothly, and that for an amateur, Dramm had done splendidly. To this compliment Uncle Tobe replied, in his quiet and drawling mode of speech, that he had studied the whole thing out in advance.

"Ef I should keep on with this way of makin' a livin' I don't 'low ever to let no slip-ups occur," he added with simple directness. There was no suggestion of the morbid in his voice or manner as he said this, but instead merely a deep personal satisfaction.

Others present, having been made sick and faint by the shock of seeing a human being summarily jerked into the hereafter, went away hurriedly without saying anything at all. But afterward thinking it over when they were more composed, they decided among themselves that Uncle Tobe had carried it off with an assurance and a skill which qualified him most aptly for future undertakings along the same line; that he was a born hangman, if ever there was one.

This was the common verdict. So, thereafter, by a tacit understanding, the ex-cattle-buyer became the regular government hang-

man. He had no official title nor any warrant in writing for the place he filled. He worked by the piece, as one might say, and not by the week or month. Some years he hanged more men than in other years, but the average per annum was about twelve. He had been hanging them now for going on ten years.

It was as though he had been designed and created for the work. He hanged villainous men singly, sometimes by pairs, and rarely in groups of threes, always without a fumble or a hitch. Once, on a single morning, he hanged an even half-dozen, these being the chief fruitage of a busy term of the Federal court down in the Indian country where the combination of a crowded docket, an energetic young district attorney with political ambitions, and a businesslike presiding judge had produced what all unprejudiced and fair-minded persons agreed were marvellous results, highly beneficial to the moral atmosphere of the territory and calculated to make potential evil-doers stop and think. Four of the six had been members of an especially desperate gang of train and bank robbers. The remaining two had forfeited their right to keep on living by slaying deputy marshals. Each, with malice aforethought and with his own hands, had actually killed some one or had aided and abetted in killing some one.

This sextuple hanging made a lot of talk, naturally. The size of it alone commanded the popular interest. Besides, the personnel of

the group of villains was such as to lend an aspect of picturesqueness to the final proceedings. The sextet included a full-blooded Cherokee; a consumptive ex-dentist out of Kansas, who from killing nerves in teeth had progressed to killing men in cold premeditation; a lank West Virginia mountaineer whose family name was the name of a clan prominent in one of the long-drawn-out hill-feuds of his native State; a plain bad man, whose chief claim to distinction was that he hailed originally from the Bowery in New York City; and one, the worst of them all, who was said to be the son of a pastor in a New England town. One by one, unerringly and swiftly, Uncle Tobe launched them through his scaffold floor to get whatever deserts await those who violate the laws of God and man by the violent shedding of innocent blood. When the sixth and last gunman came out of the prison proper into the prison enclosure—it was the former dentist, and being set, as the phrase runs, upon dying game, he wore a twisted grin upon his bleached face—there were six black boxes under the platform, five of them occupied, with their lids all in place, and one of them yet empty and open. In the act of mounting the steps the condemned craned his head sidewise, and at the sight of those coffins stretching along six in a row on the gravelled courtyard, he made a cheap and sorry gibe. But when he stood beneath the cross-arm to be pinioned, his legs played him traitor.

Those craven knees of his gave way under him, so that trusties had to hold the weakening ruffian upright while the executioner snugged the halter about his throat.

On this occasion Uncle Tobe elucidated the creed and the code of his profession for a reporter who had come all the way down from St. Louis to report the big hanging for his paper. Having covered the hanging at length, the reporter stayed over one more day at the Palace Hotel in Chickaloosa to do a special article, which would be in part a character sketch and in part a straight interview, on the subject of the hangman. The article made a full page spread in the Sunday edition of the young man's paper, and thereby a reputation, which until this time had been more or less local, was given what approximated a national notoriety. Through a somewhat general reprinting of what the young man had written, and what his paper had published, the country at large eventually became acquainted with an ethical view-point which was already fairly familiar to nearly every resident in and about Chickaloosa. Reading the narrative, one living at a distance got an accurate picture of a personality elevated above the commonplace solely by the rôle which its owner filled; a picture of an old man thoroughly sincere and thoroughly conscientious; a man dull, earnest, and capable to his limits; a man who was neither morbid nor imaginative, but filled with rather a stupid gravity; a man

canny about the pennies and affectionately inclined toward the dollars; a man honestly imbued with the idea that he was a public servant performing a necessary public service; a man without nerves, but in all other essentials a small-town man with a small-town mind; in short, saw Uncle Tobe as he really was. The reporter did something else which marked him as a craftsman. Without stating the fact in words, he nevertheless contrived to create in the lines which he wrote an atmosphere of self-defence enveloping the old man—or perhaps the better phrase would be self-extenuation. The reader was made to perceive that Dramm, being cognizant and mildly resentful of the attitude in which his own little world held him, by reason of the fatal work of his hands, sought after a semiapologetic fashion to offer a plea in abatement of public judgment, to set up a weight of moral evidence in his own behalf, and behind this in turn, and showing through it, might be sensed the shy pride of a shy man for labour undertaken with good motives and creditably performed. With no more than a pardonable broadening and exaggeration of the other's mode of speech, the reporter succeeded likewise in reproducing not only the language, but the wistful intent of what Uncle Tobe said to him. From this interview I propose now to quote to the extent of a few paragraphs. This is Uncle Tobe addressing the visiting correspondent:

"It stands to reason—don't it?—that these here sinful men have got to be hung, an' that somebody has got to hang 'em. The Good Book says an eye fur an eye an' a tooth fur a tooth an' a life fur a life. That's perzactly whut it says, an' I'm one whut believes the Bible frum kiver to kiver. These here boys that they bring in here have broke the law of Gawd an' the law of the land, an' they jest natchelly got to pay fur their devilment. That's so, ain't it? Well, then, that bein' so, I step forward an' do the job. Ef they was free men, walkin' around like you an' me, I wouldn't lay the weight of my little finger on 'em to harm a single hair in their haids. Ef they hadn't done nothin' ag'in' the law, I'd be the last one to do 'em a hurt. I wisht you could make that p'int plain in the piece you aim to write, so's folks would understand jest how I feel—so's they'd understand that I don't bear no gredge ag'inst any livin' creature.

"Ef the job was left to some greenhawn he'd mebbe botch it up an' make them boys suffer more'n there's any call fur. Sech things have happened, a plenty times before now ez you yourself doubtless know full well. But I don't botch it up. I ain't braggin' none whilst I'm sayin' this to you; I'm jest tellin' you. I kin take an oath that I ain't never botched up one of these jobs yit, not frum the very fust. The warden or Dr. Slattery, the prison physician, or anybody round this town that knows the full

circumstances kin tell you the same, ef you ast 'em. You see, son, I ain't never nervoused up like some men would be in my place. I'm always jest ez ca'm like ez whut you are this minute. The way I look at it, I'm jest a chosen instrument of the law. I regard it ez a trust that I'm called on to perform, on account of me havin' a natchel knack in that 'special direction. Some men have gifts fur one thing an' some men have gifts fur another thing. It would seem this is the perticular thing—hangin' men—that I've got a gift fur. So, sech bein' the case, I don't worry none about it beforehand, nor I don't worry none after it's all over with, neither. With me handlin' the details the whole thing is over an' done with accordin' to the law an' the statutes an' the jedgment of the high court in less time than some people would take fussin' round, gittin' ready. The way I look at it, it's a mercy an' a blessin' to all concerned to have somebody in charge that knows how to hang a man.

"Why, it's come to sech a pass that when there's a hangin' comin' off anywhere in this part of the country they send fur me to be present ez a kind of an expert. I've been to hangin's all over this State, an' down into Louisiana, an' wunst over into Texas in order to give the sheriffs the benefit of my experience an' my advice. I make it a rule not never to take no money fur doin' sech ez that—only my travelin' expenses an' my tavern bills; that's

all I ever charge 'em. But here in Chickaloosa the conditions is different, an' the gover'mint pays me seventy-five dollars a hangin'. I figger that it's wuth it, too. The Bible says the labourer is worthy of his hire. I try to be worthy of the hire I git. I certainly aim to earn it—an' I reckin I do earn it, takin' everything into consideration—the responsibility an' all. Ef there's any folks that think I earn my money easy—seventy-five dollars fur whut looks like jest a few minutes' work—I'd like fur 'em to stop an' think ef they'd consider themselves qualified to hang ez many men ez I have without never botchin' up a single job."

That was his chief boast, if boasting it might be called—that he never botched the job. It is the common history of common hangmen, so I've been told, that they come after a while to be possessed of the devils of cruelty, and to take pleasure in the exercise of their most grim calling. If this be true, then surely Uncle Tobe was to all outward appearances an exception to the rule. Never by word or look or act was he caught gloating over his victims; always he exhibited a merciful swiftness in the dread preliminaries and in the act of execution itself. At the outset he had shown deftness. With frequent practise he grew defter still. He contrived various devices for expediting the proceeding. For instance, after prolonged experiments, conducted in privacy, he evolved a

harnesslike arrangement of leather belts and straps, made all in one piece, and fitted with buckles and snaffles. With this, in a marvellously brief space, he could bind his man at elbows and wrists, at knees and ankles, so that in less time almost than it would take to describe the process, the latter stood upon the trap, as a shape deprived of motion, fully caparisoned for the end. He fitted the inner side of the crosspiece of the gallows with pegs upon which the rope rested, entirely out of sight of him upon whom it was presently to be used, until the moment when Uncle Tobe, stretching a long arm upward, brought it down, all reeved and ready. He hit upon the expedient of slickening the noose parts with yellow bar soap so that it would run smoothly in the loop and tighten smartly, without undue tugging. He might have used grease or lard, but soap was tidier, and Uncle Tobe, as has been set forth, was a tidy man.

After the first few hangings his system began to follow a regular routine. From somewhere to the west or southwest of Chickaloosa the deputy marshals would bring in a man consigned to die. The prison people, taking their charge over from them, would house him in a cell of a row of cells made doubly tight and doubly strong for such as he; in due season the warden would notify Uncle Tobe of the date fixed for the inflicting of the penalty. Four or five days preceding the day, Uncle Tobe

would pay a visit to the prison, timing his arrival so that he reached there just before the exercise hour for the inmates of a certain cell-tier. Being admitted, he would climb sundry flights of narrow iron stairs and pause just outside a crisscrossed door of iron slats while a turnkey, entering that door and locking it behind him, would open a smaller door set flat in the wall of damp-looking grey stones and invite the man caged up inside to come forth for his daily walk. Then, while the captive paced the length and breadth of the narrow corridor back and across, to and fro, up and down, with the futile restlessness of a cat animal in a zoo, his feet clumping on the flagged flooring, and the watchful turnkey standing by, Uncle Tobe, having flattened his lean form in a niche behind the outer lattice, with an appraising eye would consider the shifting figure through a convenient cranny of the wattled metal strips. He took care to keep himself well back out of view, but since he stood in shadow while the one he marked so keenly moved in a flood of daylight filtering down through a skylight in the ceiling of the cell block, the chances were the prisoner could not have made out the indistinct form of the stranger anyhow. Five or ten minutes of such scrutiny of his man was all Uncle Tobe ever desired. In his earlier days before he took up this present employment, he had been an adept at guessing the hoof-weight of the beeves and swine in which

he dealt. That early experience stood him in good stead now; he took no credit to himself for his accuracy in estimating the bulk of a living human being.

Downstairs, on the way out of the place, if by chance he encountered the warden in his office, the warden, in all likelihood, would say: "Well, how about it this time, Uncle Tobe?"

And Uncle Tobe would make some such answer as this:

"Well, suh, accordin' to my reckonin' this here one will heft about a hund'ed an' sixty-five pound, ez he stands now. How's he takin' it, warden?"

"Oh, so-so."

"He looks to me like he was broodin' a right smart," the expert might say. "I jedge he ain't relishin' his vittles much, neither. Likely he'll worry three or four pound more off'n his bones 'twixt now an' Friday mornin'. He oughter run about one hund'ed an' sixty or mebbe one-sixty-one by then."

"How much drop do you allow to give him?"

"Don't worry about that, suh," would be the answer given with a contemplative squint of the placid, pale eye. "I reckin my calculations won't be very fur out of the way, ef any."

They never were, either.

On the day before the day, he would be a busy man, what with superintending the fitting together and setting up of the painted lumber

pieces upon which to-morrow's capital tragedy would be played; and, when this was done to his liking, trying the drop to see that the boards had not warped, and trying the rope for possible flaws in its fabric or weave, and proving to his own satisfaction that the mechanism of the wooden lever which operated to spring the trap worked with an instantaneous smoothness. To every detail he gave a painstaking supervision, guarding against all possible contingencies. Regarding the trustworthiness of the rope he was especially careful. When this particular hanging was concluded, the scaffold would be taken apart and stored away for subsequent use, but for each hanging the government furnished a brand new rope, especially made at a factory in New Orleans at a cost of eight dollars. The spectators generally cut the rope up into short lengths after it had fulfilled its ordained purpose, and carried the pieces away for souvenirs. So always there was a new rope provided, and its dependability must be ascertained by prolonged and exhaustive tests before Uncle Tobe would approve of it. Seeing him at his task, with his coat and waistcoat off, his sleeves rolled back, and his intent mien, one realised why, as a hangman, he had been a success. He left absolutely nothing to chance. When he was through with his experimenting, the possibility of an exhibition of the proneness of inanimate objects to misbehave in emergencies had been reduced to a minimum.

Before daylight next morning Uncle Tobe, dressed in sober black, like a country undertaker, and with his mid-Victorian whiskers all cleansed and combed, would present himself at his post of duty. He would linger in the background, an unobtrusive bystander, until the condemned sinner had gone through the mockery of eating his last breakfast; and, still making himself inconspicuous during the march to the gallows, would trail at the very tail of the line, while the short, straggling procession was winding out through gas-lit murky hallways into the pale dawn-light slanting over the walls of the gravel-paved, high-fenced compound built against the outer side of the prison close. He would wait on, always holding himself discreetly aloof from the middle breadth of the picture, until the officiating clergyman had done with his sacred offices; would wait until the white-faced wretch on whose account the government was making all this pother and taking all this trouble, had mumbled his farewell words this side of eternity; would continue to wait, very patiently, indeed, until the warden nodded to him. Then, with his trussing harness tucked under his arm, and the black cap neatly folded and bestowed in a handy side-pocket of his coat, Uncle Tobe would advance forward, and laying a kindly, almost a paternal hand upon the shoulder of the man who must die, would steer him to a certain spot in the centre of the platform, just beneath

a heavy cross-beam. There would follow a quick shifting of the big, gnarled hands over the unresisting body of the doomed man, and almost instantly, so it seemed to those who watched, all was in order: the arms of the murderer drawn rearward and pressed in close against his ribs by a broad girth encircling his trunk at the elbows, his wrists caught together in buckled leather cuffs behind his back; his knees and his ankles fast in leathern loops which joined to the rest of the apparatus by means of a transverse strap drawn tautly down the length of his legs, at the back; the black-cloth head-bag with its peaked crown in place; the noose fitted; the hobbled and hooded shape perhaps swaying a trifle this way and that; and Uncle Tobe on his tiptoes stepping swiftly over to a tilted wooden lever which projected out and upward through the planked floor, like the handle of a steering oar.

It was at this point that the timorous-hearted among the witnesses turned their heads away. Those who were more resolute—or as the case might be, more morbid—and who continued to look, were made aware of a freak of physics which in accord, I suppose, with the laws of horizontals and parallels decrees that a man cut off short from life by quick and violent means and fallen prone upon the earth, seems to shrink up within himself and to grow shorter in body and in sprawling limb, whereas one hanged with a rope by the neck has the sem-

blance of stretching out to unseemly and unhuman lengths all the while that he dangles.

Having repossessed himself of his leather cinches, Uncle Tobe would presently depart for his home, stopping *en route* at the Chickaloosa National Bank to deposit the greater part of the seventy-five dollars which the warden, as representative of a satisfied Federal government, had paid him, cash down on the spot. To his credit in the bank the old man had a considerable sum, all earned after this mode, and all drawing interest at the legal rate. On his arrival at his home, Mr. Dramm would first of all have his breakfast. This over, he would open the second drawer of an old black-walnut bureau, and from under a carefully folded pile of spare undergarments would withdraw a small, cheap book, bound in imitation red leather, and bearing the word "Accounts" in faded script upon the cover. On a clean, blue-lined page of the book, in a cramped handwriting, he would write in ink, the name, age, height, and weight of the man he had just despatched out of life; also the hour and minute when the drop fell, the time elapsing before the surgeons pronounced the man dead; the disposition which had been made of the body, and any other data which seemed to him pertinent to the record. Invariably he concluded the entry thus: "Neck was broke by the fall. Everything passed off smooth." From his

first time of service he had never failed to make such notations following a hanging, he being in this, as in all things, methodical and exact.

The rest of the day, in all probabilities, would be given to small devices of his own. If the season suited he might work in his little truck garden at the back of the house, or if it were the fall of the year he might go rabbit hunting; then again he might go for a walk. When the evening paper came—Chickaloosa had two papers, a morning paper and an evening paper—he would read through the account given of the event at the prison, and would pencil any material errors which had crept into the reporter's story, and then he would clip out the article and file it away with a sheaf of similar clippings in the same bureau drawer where he kept his account-book and his underclothing. This done he would eat his supper, afterward washing and wiping the supper dishes and, presently bedtime for him having arrived, he would go to bed and sleep very soundly and very peacefully all night. Sometimes his heart trouble brought on smothering spells which woke him up. He rarely had dreams, and never any dreams unpleasantly associated with his avocation. Probably never was there a man blessed with less of an imagination than this same Tobias Dramm. It seemed almost providential, considering the calling he followed, that he altogether lacked the faculty

of introspection, so that neither his memory nor his conscience ever troubled him.

Thus far I have made no mention of his household, and for the very good reason that he had none. In his youth he had not married. The forked tongue of town slander had it that he was too stingy to support a wife, and on top of that expense, to run the risk of having children to rear. He had no close kindred excepting a distant cousin or two in Chickaloosa. He kept no servant, and for this there was a double cause. First, his parsimonious instincts; second, the fact that for love or money no negro would minister to him, and in this community negroes were the only household servants to be had. Among the darkies there was current a belief that at dead of night he dug up the bodies of those he had hanged and peddled the cadavers to the "student doctors." They said he was in active partnership with the devil; they said the devil took over the souls of his victims, paying therefor in red-hot dollars, after the hangman was done with their bodies. The belief of the negroes that this unholy traffic existed amounted with them to a profound conviction. They held Mr. Dramm in an awesome and horrified veneration, bowing to him most respectfully when they met him, and then sidling off hurriedly. It would have taken strong horses to drag any black-skinned resident of Chickaloosa to the portals of the little three-roomed frame cottage

in the outskirts of the town which Uncle Tobe tenanted. Therefore he lived by himself, doing his own skimpy marketing and his own simple housekeeping. Loneliness was a part of the penalty he paid for following the calling of a gallowsmith.

Among members of his own race he had no close friends. For the most part the white people did not exactly shun him, but, as the saying goes in the Southwest, they let him be. They were well content to enshrine him as a local celebrity, and ready enough to point him out to visitors, but by an unwritten communal law the line was drawn there. He was as one set apart for certain necessary undertakings, and yet denied the intimacy of his kind because he performed them acceptably. If his aloof and solitary state ever distressed him, at least he gave no outward sign of it, but went his uncomplaining way, bearing himself with a homely, silent dignity, and enveloped in those invisible garments of superstition which local prejudice and local ignorance had conjured up.

Ready as he was when occasion suited, to justify his avocation in the terms of that same explanation which he had given to the young reporter from St. Louis that time, and greatly though he may have craved to gain the good-will of his fellow citizens, he was never known openly to rebel against his lot. The nearest he ever came to doing this was once when he met upon the street a woman of his acquaintance

who had suffered a recent bereavement in the death of her only daughter. He approached her, offering awkward condolences, and at once was moved to a further expression of his sympathy for her in her great loss by trying to shake her hand. At the touch of his fingers to hers the woman, already in a mood of grief bordering on hysteria, shrank back screaming out that his hand smelled of the soap with which he coated his gallows-nooses. She ran away from him, crying out as she ran, that he was accursed; that he was marked with that awful smell and could not rid himself of it. To those who had witnessed this scene the hangman, with rather an injured and bewildered air, made explanation. The poor woman, he said, was wrong; although in a way of speaking she was right, too. He did, indeed, use the same yellow bar soap for washing his hands that he used for anointing his ropes. It was a good soap, and cheap; he had used the same brand regularly for years in cleansing his hands. Since it answered the first purpose so well, what possible harm could there be in slicking the noose of the rope with it when he was called upon to conduct one of his jobs over up at the prison? Apparently he was at a loss to fathom the looks they cast at him when he had finished with this statement and had asked this question. He began a protest, but broke off quickly and went away shaking his head as though puzzled that ordinarily sane folks should be so squeamish

and so unreasonable. But he kept on using the soap as before.

Until now this narrative has been largely preamble. The real story follows. It concerns itself with the birth of an imagination.

In his day Uncle Tobe hanged all sorts and conditions of men—men who kept on vainly hoping against hope for an eleventh-hour reprieve long after the last chance of reprieve had vanished, and who on the gallows begged piteously for five minutes, for two minutes, for one minute more of precious grace; negroes gone drunk on religious exhortation who died in a frenzy, sure of salvation, and shouting out halleluiahs; Indians upborne and stayed by a racial stoicism; Chinamen casting stolid, slant-eyed glances over the rim of the void before them and filled with the calmness of the fatalist who believes that whatever is to be, is to be; white men upon whom at the last, when all prospect of intervention was gone, a mental numbness mercifully descended with the result that they came to the rope's embrace like men in a walking coma, with glazed, unseeing eyes, and dragging feet; other white men who summoned up a mockery of bravado and uttered poor jests from between lips drawn back in defiant sneering as they gave themselves over to the hangman, so that only Uncle Tobe, feeling their flesh crawling under their grave-clothes as he tied them up, knew a hideous

terror berode their bodies. At length, in the tenth year of his career as a paid executioner he was called upon to visit his professional attentions upon a man different from any of those who had gone down the same dread chute.

The man in question was a train-bandit popularly known as the Lone-Hand Kid, because always he conducted his nefarious operations without confederates. He was a squat, dark ruffian, as malignant as a moccasin snake, and as dangerous as one. He was filthy in speech and vile in habit, being in his person most unpicturesque and most unwholesome, and altogether seemed a creature more viper than he was man. The sheriffs of two border States and the officials of a contiguous reservation sought for him many times, long and diligently, before a posse overcame him in the hills by over-powering odds and took him alive at the cost of two of its members killed outright and a third badly crippled. So soon as surgeons plugged up the holes in his hide which members of the vengeful posse shot into him after they had him surrounded and before his ammunition gave out, he was brought to bar to answer for the unprovoked murder of a postal clerk on a transcontinental limited. No time was wasted in hurrying his trial through to its conclusion; it was felt that there was crying need to make an example of this red-handed desperado. Having been convicted with commendable celerity, the Lone-Hand Kid

was transferred to Chickaloosa and strongly confined there against the day of Uncle Tobe's ministrations upon him.

From the very hour that the prosecution was started, the Lone-Hand Kid, whose real name was the prosaic name of Smith, objected strongly to this procedure which in certain circles is known as "railroading." He insisted that he was being legally expedited out of life on his record and not on the evidence. There were plenty of killings for any one of which he might have been tried and very probably found guilty, but he reckoned it a profound injustice that he should be indicted, tried, and condemned for a killing he had not committed. By his code he would not have rebelled strongly against being punished for the evil things he himself had done; he did dislike, though, being hanged for something some rival hold-up man had done. Such was his contention, and he reiterated it with a persistence which went far toward convincing some people that after all there might be something in what he said, although among honest men there was no doubt whatsoever that the world would be a sweeter and a healthier place to live in with the Lone-Hand Kid entirely translated out of it.

Having been dealt with, as he viewed the matter, most unfairly, the condemned killer sullenly refused to make submission to his appointed destiny. On the car journey up to

Chickaloosa, although still weak from his wounds and securely ironed besides, he made two separate efforts to assault his guards. In his cell, a few days later, he attacked a turnkey in pure wantonness seemingly, since even with the turnkey eliminated, there still was no earthly prospect for him to escape from the steel strong-box which enclosed him. That was what it truly was, too, a strong-box, for the storing of many living pledges held as surety for the peace and good order of the land. Of all these human collaterals who were penned up there with him, he, for the time being, was most precious in the eyes of the law. Therefore the law took no chance of losing him, and this he must have known when he maimed his keeper.

After this outbreak he was treated as a vicious wild beast, which, undoubtedly, was exactly what he was. He was chained by his ankles to his bed, and his food was shoved in to him through the bars by a man who kept himself at all times well out of reach of the tethered prisoner. Having been rendered helpless, he swore then that when finally they unbarred his cell door and sought to fetch him forth to garb him for his journey to the gallows, he would fight them with his teeth and his bare hands for so long as he had left an ounce of strength with which to fight. Bodily force would then be the only argument remaining to him by means of which he might express his

protest, and he told all who cared to listen that most certainly he meant to invoke it.

There was a code of decorum which governed the hangings at Chickaloosa, and the resident authorities dreaded mightily the prospect of having it profaned by spiteful and unmannerly behaviour on the part of the Lone-Hand Kid. There was said to be in all the world just one living creature for whom the rebellious captive entertained love and respect, and this person was his half-sister. With the good name of his prison at heart, the warden put up the money that paid her fare from her home down in the Indian Territory. Two days before the execution she arrived, a slab-sided, shabby drudge of a woman. Having first been primed and prompted for her part, she was sent to him, and in his cell she wept over the fettered prisoner, and with him she pleaded until he promised her, reluctantly, he would make no physical struggle on being led out to die.

He kept his word, too; but it was to develop that the pledge of non-resistance, making his body passive to the will of his jailers, did not, according to the Lone-Hand Kid's sense of honour, include the muscles of his tongue. His hour came at sunup of a clear, crisp, October morning, when a rime of frost made a silver carpet upon the boarded floor of the scaffold, and in the east the heavens glowed an irate red, like the reflections of a distant bale-fire. From his cell door before the head

warder summoned him forth, he drove away with terrible oaths the clergyman who had come to offer him religious consolation. At daylight, when the first beams of young sunlight were stealing in at the slitted windows to streak the whitewashed wall behind him with a barred pattern of red, like brush strokes of fresh paint, he ate his last breakfast with foul words between bites, and outside, a little later, in the shadow of the crosstree from which shortly he would dangle in the article of death, a stark offence before the sight of mortal eyes, he halted and stood reviling all who had a hand in furthering and compassing his condemnation. Profaning the name of his Maker with every breath, he cursed the President of the United States who had declined to reprieve him, the justices of the high court who had denied his appeal from the verdict of the lower, the judge who had tried him, the district attorney who had prosecuted him, the grand jurors who had indicted him, the petit jurors who had voted to convict him, the witnesses who had testified against him, the posse men who had trapped him, consigning them all and singly to everlasting damnation. Before this pouring flood of blasphemy the minister, who had followed him up the gallows steps in the vain hope that when the end came some faint sign of contrition might be vouchsafed by this poor lost soul, hid his face in his hands as though fearing an offended Deity would send a bolt

from on high to blast all who had been witnesses to such impiety and such impenitence.

The indignant warden moved to cut short this lamentable spectacle. He signed with his hand for Uncle Tobe to make haste, and Uncle Tobe, obeying, stepped forward from where he had been waiting in the rear rank of the shocked spectators. Upon him the defiant ruffian turned the forces of his sulfurous hate, full-gush. First over one shoulder and then over the other as the executioner worked with swift fingers to bind him into a rigid parcel of a man, he uttered what was both a dreadful threat and a yet more dreadful promise.

"I ain't blamin' these other folks here," he proclaimed. "Some of 'em are here because it's their duty to be here, an' ef these others kin git pleasure out of seein' a man croaked that ain't afeared of bein' croaked, they're welcome to enjoy the free show, so fur ez I'm concerned. But you—you stingy, white-whiskered old snake!—you're doin' this fur the little piece of dirty money that's in it fur you.

"Listen to me, you dog: I know I'm headin' straight fur hell, an' I ain't skeered to go, neither. But I ain't goin' to stay there. I'm comin' back fur you! I'm comin' back this very night to git you an' take your old, withered, black soul back down to hell with me. No need fur you to try to hide. Wharever you hide I'll seek you out. You can't git away

frum me. You kin lock your door an' you kin lock your winder, an' you kin hide your head under the bedclothes, but I'll find you wharever you are, remember that! An' you're goin' back down there with me!

"Now go ahead an' hang me—I'm all set fur it ef you are!"

Through this harangue Uncle Tobe worked on, outwardly composed. Whatever his innermost emotions may have been, his expression gave no hint that the mouthings of the Lone-Hand Kid had sunk in. He drew the peaked black sack down across the swollen face, hiding the glaring eyes and the lips that snarled. He brought the rope forward over the cloaked head and drew the noose in tautly, with the knot adjusted to fit snugly just under the left ear, so that the hood took on the semblance of a well-filled, inverted bag with its puckered end fluting out in the effect of a dark ruff upon the hunched shoulders of its wearer. Stepping back, he gripped the handle of the lever-bar, and with all his strength jerked it toward him. A square in the floor opened as the trap was flapped back upon its hinges, and through the opening the haltered form shot straight downward to bring up with a great jerk, and after that to dangle like a plumb-bob on a string. Under the quick strain the gallows-arm creaked and whined; in the silence which followed the hangman was heard to exhale his breath in a vast puff of relief. His hand went up to his

forehead to wipe beads of sweat which for all that the morning was cool almost to coldness, had suddenly popped out through his skin. He for one was mighty glad the thing was done, and, as he in this moment figured, well done.

But for once and once only as those saw who had the hardihood to look, Uncle Tobe had botched up a job. Perhaps it was because of his great haste to make an end of a scandalous scene; perhaps because the tirade of the bound malefactor had discomfited him and made his fingers fumble this one time at their familiar task. Whatever the cause, it was plainly enough to be seen that the heavy knot had not cracked the Lone-Hand Kid's spine. The noose, as was ascertained later, had caught on the edge of the broad jawbone, and the man, instead of dying instantly, was strangling to death by degrees and with much struggling.

In the next half minute a thing even more grievous befell. The broad strap which girthed the murderer's trunk just above the bend of the elbows, held fast, but the rest of the harness, having been improperly snaffled on, loosened and fell away from the twitching limbs so that as the elongated body twisted to and fro in half circles, the lower arms winnowed the air in foreshortened and contorted flappings, and the freed legs drew up and down convulsively.

Very naturally, Uncle Tobe was chagrined; perhaps he had hidden within him emotions deeper than those bred of a personal mortifica-

tion. At any rate, after a quick, distressed glance through the trap at the writhing shape of agony below, he turned his eyes from it and looked steadfastly at the high wall facing him. It chanced to be the western wall, which was bathed in a ruddy glare where the shafts of the upcoming sun, lifting over the panels at the opposite side of the fenced enclosure, began to fall diagonally upon the whitewashed surface just across. And now, against that glowing plane of background opposite him, there appeared as he looked the slanted shadow of a swaying rope framed in at right and at left by two broader, deeper lines which were the shadows marking the timber uprights that supported the scaffold at its nearer corners; and also there appeared, midway between the framing shadows, down at the lower end of the slender line of the cord, an exaggerated, wriggling manifestation like the reflection of a huge and misshapen jumping-jack, which first would lengthen itself grotesquely, and then abruptly would shorten up, as the tremors running through the dying man's frame altered the silhouette cast by the oblique sunbeams; and along with this stencilled vision, as a part of it, occurred shifting shadow movements of two legs dancing busily on nothing, and of two foreshortened arms, flapping up and down. It was no pretty picture to look upon, yet Uncle Tobe, plucking with a tremulous hand at the ends of his beard, continued to stare at the appari-

tion, daunted and fascinated. To him it must have seemed as though the Lone-Hand Kid, with a malignant pertinacity which lingered on in him after by rights the last breath should have been squeezed out of his wretched carcass, was painting upon those tall planks the picture and the presentiment of his farewell threat.

Nearly half an hour passed before the surgeons consented that the body should be taken down and boxed. His harness which had failed him having been returned to its owner, he made it up into a compact bundle and collected his regular fee and went away very quietly. Ordinarily, following his habitual routine, he would have gone across town to his little house; would have washed his hands with a bar of the yellow laundry soap; would have cooked and eaten his breakfast, and then, after tidying up the kitchen, would have made the customary entry in his red-backed account-book. But this morning he seemed to have no appetite, and besides, he felt an unaccountable distaste for his home, with its silence and its emptiness. Somehow he much preferred the open air, with the skies over him and wide reaches of space about him; which was doubly strange, seeing that he was no lover of nature, but always theretofore had accepted sky and grass and trees as matters of course—things as inevitable and commonplace as the weathers and the winds.

Throughout the day and until well on toward night he was beset by a curious, uncommon restlessness which made it hard for him to linger long in any one spot. He idled about the streets of the town; twice he wandered aimlessly miles out along roads beyond the town. All the while, without cessation, there was a tugging and nagging at his nerve-ends, a constant inward irritation which laid a hold on his thoughts, twitching them off into unpleasant channels. It kept him from centering his interest upon the casual things about him; inevitably it turned his mind back to inner contemplations. The sensation was mental largely, but it seemed so nearly akin to the physical that to himself Uncle Tòbe diagnosed it as the after-result of a wrench for his weak heart. You see, never before having experienced the reactions of a suddenly quickened imagination, he, naturally, was at a loss to account for it on any other ground.

Also he was weighted down by an intense depression that his clean record of ten years should have been marred by a mishap; this regret, constantly recurring in his thoughts, served to make him unduly sensitive. He had a feeling that people stared hard at him as they passed and, after he had gone by, that they turned to stare at him some more. Under this scrutiny he gave no sign of displeasure, but inwardly he resented it. Of course these folks had heard of what had happened up at

the prison, and no doubt among themselves would be commenting upon the tragedy and gossiping about it. Well, any man was liable to make a slip once; nobody was perfect. It would never happen again; he was sure of that much.

All day he mooned about, a brooding, uneasy figure, speaking to scarcely any one at all, but followed wherever he went by curious eyes. It was late in the afternoon before it occurred to him that he had eaten nothing all day, and that he had failed to deposit the money he had earned that morning. It would be too late now to get into the bank; the bank, which opened early, closed at three o'clock. To-morrow would do as well. Although he had no zest for food despite his fast, he figured maybe it was the long abstinence which was filling his head with such flighty notions, so he entered a small, smelly lunch-room near the railroad station, and made a pretense of eating an order of ham and eggs. He tried not to notice that the black waiter who served him shrank away from his proximity, shying off like a breechy colt, from the table where Uncle Tobe sat, whenever his business brought him into that part of the place. What difference did a fool darky's fears make, anyway?

Dusk impended when he found himself approaching his three-room house, looming up as a black oblong, where it stood aloof from its neighbours, with vacant lands about it. The

house faced north and south. On the nearer edge of the unfenced common, which extended up to it on the eastern side, he noted as he drew close that somebody—perhaps a boy, or more probably a group of boys—had made a bonfire of fallen autumn leaves and brushwood. Going away as evening came, they had left their bonfire to burn itself out. The smouldering pile was almost under his bedroom window. He regretted rather that the boys had gone; an urgent longing for human companionship of some sort, however remote—a yearning he had never before felt with such acuteness—was upon him. Tormented, as he still was, by strange vagaries, he had almost to force himself to unlock the front door and cross the threshold into the gloomy interior of his cottage. But before entering, and while he yet wrestled with a vague desire to retrace his steps and go back down the street, he stooped and picked up his copy of the afternoon paper which the carrier, with true carrierlike accuracy, had flung upon the narrow front porch.

Inside the house, the floor gave off sharp little sounds, the warped floor squeaking and wheezing under the weight of his tread. Subconsciously, this irritated him; a lot of causes were combining to harass him, it seemed; there was a general conspiracy on the part of objects animate and inanimate to make him—well, suspicious. And Uncle Tobe was not given to nervousness, which made it worse. He was

ashamed of himself that he should be in such state. Glancing about him in a furtive, almost in an apprehensive way, he crossed the front room to the middle room, which was his bed chamber, the kitchen being the room at the rear. In the middle room he lit a coal-oil lamp which stood upon a small centre table. Alongside the table he opened out the paper and glanced at a caption running half-way across the top of the front page; then, fretfully he crumpled up the printed sheet in his hand and let it fall upon the floor. He had no desire to read the account of his one failure. Why should the editor dwell at such length and with so prodigal a display of black head-line type upon this one bungled job when every other job of all the jobs that had gone before, had been successful in every detail? Let's see, now, how many men had he hanged with precision and with speed and with never an accident to mar the proceedings? A long, martialed array of names came trooping into his brain, and along with the names the memories of the faces of all those dead men to whom the names had belonged. The faces began to pass before him in a mental procession. This wouldn't do. Since there were no such things as ghosts or haunts; since, as all sensible men agreed, the dead never came back from the grave, it was a foolish thing for him to be creating those unpleasant images in his mind. He shook his head to clear it of recollections which were the

better forgotten. He shook it again and again.

He would get to bed; a good night's rest would make him feel better and more natural. It was an excellent idea—this idea of sleep. So he raised the bottommost half of the curtainless side window for air, drew down the shade by the string suspended from its lower cross breadth, until the lower edge of the shade came even with the window sash, and undressed himself to his undergarments. He was about to blow out the light when he remembered he had left the money that was the price of his morning's work in his trousers which hung, neatly folded, across the back of a chair by the centre table. He was in the act of withdrawing the bills from the bottom of one of the trouser-pockets when right at his feet there was a quick, queer sound of rustling. As he glared down, startled, out from under the crumpled newspaper came timorously creeping a half-grown, sickly looking rat, minus its tail, having lost its tail in a trap, perhaps, or possibly in a battle with other rats.

At best a rat is no pleasant bedroom companion, and besides, Uncle Tobe had been seriously annoyed. He kicked out with one of his bare feet, taking the rat squarely in its side as it scurried for its hole in the wainscoting. He hurt it badly. It landed with a thump ten feet away and sprawled out on the floor kicking and squealing feebly. Holding the

wad of bills in his left hand, with his right Uncle Tobe deftly plucked up the crushed vermin by the loose fold of skin at the nape of its neck, and with a quick flirt of his arm tossed it sidewise from him to cast it out of the half-opened window. He returned to the table and bent over and blew down the lamp chimney, and in the darkness felt his way across the room to his bed. He stretched himself full length upon it, drew the cotton comforter up to cover him, and shoved the money under the pillow.

His fingers were relaxing their grip on the bills when he saw something—something which instantly turned him stiff and rigid and deathly cold all over, leaving him without will-power or strength to move his head or shift his gaze. Over the white, plastered wall alongside his bed an unearthly red glow sprang up, turning a deeper, angrier red as it spread and widened. Against this background next stood out two perpendicular masses like the broad shadows of uprights—like the supporting uprights of a gallows, say—and in the squared space of brightness thus marked off, depending midway from the shadow crossing it at right angles at the top, appeared a filmy, fine line, which undoubtedly was the shadow of a cord, and at the end of the cord dangled a veritable jumping-jack of a silhouette, turning and writhing and jerking, with a shape which in one breath grotesquely lengthened and in the next shrank

up to half its former dimensions, which kicked out with indistinct movements of its lower extremities, which flapped with foreshortened strokes of the shadowy upper limbs, which altogether so contorted itself as to form the likeness of a thing all out of perspective, all out of proportion, and all most horribly reminiscent.

A heart with valves already weakened by a chronic affection can stand just so many shocks in a given time and no more.

A short time later in this same night, at about eight-forty-five o'clock, to be exact, a man who lived on the opposite side of the unfenced common gave the alarm of fire over the telephone. The Chickaloosa fire engine and hose reels came at once, and with the machines numerous citizens.

In a way of speaking, it turned out to be a false alarm. A bonfire of leaves and brush, abandoned at dusk by the boys who kindled it, had, after smouldering a while, sprung up briskly and, flaming high, was now scorching the clapboarded side of the Dramm house.

There was no need for the firemen to uncouple a line of hose from the reel. While two of them made shift to get retorts of a patent extinguisher from the truck, two more, wondering why Uncle Tobe, even if in bed and asleep at so early an hour, had not been aroused

by the noise of the crowd's coming, knocked at his front door. There being no response from within at once, they suspected something must be amiss. With heaves of their shoulders they forced the door off its hinges, and entering in company, they groped their passage through the empty front room into the bedroom behind it, which was lighted after a fashion by the reflection from the mounting flames without.

The tenant was in bed; he lay on his side with his face turned to the wall; he made no answer to their hails. When they bent over him they knew why. No need to touch him, then, with that look on his face and that stare out of his popped eyes. He was dead, all right enough; but plainly had not been dead long; not more than a few minutes, apparently. One of his hands was shoved up under his pillow with the fingers touching a small roll containing seven ten-dollar bills and one five-dollar bill; the other hand still gripped a fold of the coverlet as though the fatal stroke had come upon the old man as he lifted the bedclothing to draw it up over his face. These incidental facts were noted down later after the coroner had been called to take charge; they were the subject of considerable comment next day when the inquest took place. The coroner was of the opinion that the old man had been killed by a heart seizure, and that he had died on the instant the attack came.

However, this speculation had no part in the

thoughts of the two startled firemen at the moment of the finding of the body. What most interested them, next only to the discovery of the presence of the dead man there in the same room with them, was a queer combination of shadows which played up and down against the wall beyond the bed, it being plainly visible in the glare of the small conflagration just outside.

With one accord they turned about, and then they saw the cause of the phenomenon, and realised that it was not very much of a phenomenon after all, although unusual enough to constitute a rather curious circumstance. A crippled, tailless rat had somehow entangled its neck in a loop at the end of the dangling cord of the half-drawn shade at the side window on the opposite side of the room and, being too weak to wriggle free, was still hanging there, jerking and kicking, midway of the window opening. The glow of the pile of burning leaves and brush behind and beyond it, brought out its black outlines with remarkable clearness.

The patterned shadow upon the wall, though, disappeared in the same instant that the men outside began spraying their chemical compound from the two extinguishers upon the ambitious bonfire to douse it out, and one of the firemen slapped the rat down to the floor and killed it with a stamp of his foot.

CHAPTER II

THE BROKEN SHOELACE

I

IN the aching, baking middle of a sizzling New York's summer, there befell New York's regular "crime wave." When the city is a brazen skillet, whereon mankind, assailed by the sun from above and by the stored-up heat from below, fries on both sides like an egg; when nerves are worn to frazzle-ends; when men and women, suffocating by tedious degrees in the packed and steaming tenements, lie there and curse the day they were born—then comes the annual "crime wave," as the papers love to name it. In truth the papers make it first and then they name it. Misdeeds of great and small degree are ranged together and displayed in parallel columns as common symptoms of a high tide of violence, a perfect ground swell of lawlessness. To a city editor the scope of a crime wave is as elastic a thing as a hot weather "story," when under the heading of Heat Prostrations are listed all who fall in the streets, stricken by whatsoever cause. This is done as

a sop to local pride, proving New York to be a deadlier spot in summer than Chicago or St. Louis.

True enough, in such a season, people do have shorter tempers than at other times; they come to blows on small provocation and come to words on still less. So maybe there was a real "crime wave," making men bloody-minded and homicidal. Be that as it may, the thing reached its apogee in the murder of old Steinway, the so-called millionnaire miser of Murray Hill, he being called a millionnaire because he had money, and a miser because he saved it.

It was in mid-August that the aged Steinway was choked to death in his rubbishy old house in East Thirty-ninth Street, where by the current rumour of the neighbourhood, he kept large sums in cash. Suspicion fell upon the recluse's nephew, one Maxwell, who vanished with the discovery of the murder.

The police compiled and widely circulated a description of the suspect, his looks, manners, habits and peculiarities; and certain distant relatives and presumptive heirs of the dead man came forward promptly, offering a lump sum in cash for his capture, living; but all this labour was without reward. The fugitive went uncaptured, while the summer dragged on to its end, burning up in the fiery furnace of its own heat.

For one dweller of the city—and he, I may tell you, is the central figure in this story—it dragged on with particular slowness. Judson

Green, the hero of our tale—if it has any hero—was a young man of some wealth and more leisure. Also he was a young man of theories. For example, he had a theory that around every corner of every great city romance lurked, ready for some one to come and find it. True, he never had found it, but that, he insisted, was because he hadn't looked for it; it was there all right, waiting to be flushed, like a quail from a covert.

Voicing this belief over a drink at a club, on an evening in June, he had been challenged promptly by one of those argumentative persons who invariably disagree with every proposition as a matter of principle, and for the sake of the debate.

"All rot, Green," the other man had said. "Just plain rot. Adventure's not a thing that you find yourself. It's something that comes and finds you—once in a life-time. I'll bet that in three months of trying you couldn't, to save your life, have a real adventure in this town—I mean an adventure out of the ordinary. Elopements and automobile smash-ups are barred."

"How much will you bet?" asked Judson Green.

"A hundred," said the other man, whose name was Wainwright.

Reaching with one hand for his fountain pen, Judson Green beckoned a waiter with the other and told him to bring a couple of blank checks.

II

So that was how it had started, and that was why Judson Green had spent the summer in New York instead of running away to the north woods or the New England shore, as nearly everybody he knew did. Diligently had he sought to win that hundred dollars of the contentious Wainwright; diligently had he ranged from one end of New York to the other, seeking queer people and queer things—seeking anything that might properly be said to constitute adventure. Sometimes a mildly interested and mildly satirical friend accompanied him; oftener he went alone, an earnest and determined young man. Yet, whether with company or without it, his luck uniformly was poor. The founts of casual adventure had, it seemed, run stone dry; such weather was enough to dry up anything.

Yet he had faithfully tried all those formulas which in the past were supposed to have served the turns of those seeking adventure in a great city. There was the trick of bestowing a thousand-dollar bill upon a chance vagrant and then trailing after the recipient to note what happened to him, in his efforts to change the bill. Heretofore, in fiction at least, the following of this plan had invariably brought forth most beautiful results. Accordingly, Judson Green tried it.

He tried it at Coney Island one July evening. He chose Coney Island deliberately, because of all the places under the sun, Coney Island is pre-eminently the home and haunt of the North American dime. At Coney, a dime will buy almost anything except what a half-dime will buy. On Surf Avenue, then, which is Coney's Greatest Common Divisor, he strolled back and forth, looking for one of an aspect suitable for this experiment. Mountain gorges of painted canvas and sheet-tin towered above him; palace pinnacles of lath and plaster speared the sky; the moist salt air, blowing in from the adjacent sea, was enriched with dust and with smells of hot sausages and fried crabs, and was shattered by the bray of bagpipes, the exact and mechanical melodies of steam organs, and the insistent, compelling, never-dying blat of the spieler, the barker and the ballyhoo. Also there were perhaps a hundred thousand other smells and noises, did one care to take the time and trouble to classify them. And here the very man he sought to find, found him.

There came to him, seeking alms, one who was a thing of shreds and patches and broken shoes. His rags seemed to adhere to him by the power of cohesive friction rather than by any visible attachments; it might have been years since he had a hat that had a brim. It was in the faint and hungered whine of the professional that he asked for the money to buy one cup of coffee; yet as he spoke, his breath had

the rich alcoholic fragrance of a hot plum pudding with brandy sauce.

The beggar made his plea and, with a dirty palm outstretched, waited in patient suppliance. He sustained the surprise of his whole panhandling life. He was handed a new, uncreased one-thousand-dollar bill. He was told that he must undertake to change the bill and spend small fractional parts of it. Succeeding here, he should have five per cent of it for his own. As Judson Green impressed these details upon the ragged vagrant's dazed understanding, he edged closer and closer to his man, ready to cut off any sudden attempt at flight.

The precaution was entirely unnecessary. Perhaps it was because this particular panhandler had the honour of his profession—in moments of confidence he might have told you, with some pride, that he was no thief. Or possibly the possession of such unheard-of wealth crippled his powers of imagination. There are people who are made financially embarrassed by having no money at all, but more who are made so by having too much. Our most expensive hotels are full of whole families who, having become unexpectedly and abruptly wealthy, are now suffering from this painful form of financial embarrassment; they wish to disburse large sums freely and gracefully, and they don't know how. They lack the requisite training. In a way of speaking, this mendicant of Coney Island was perhaps of this class.

With his jaw lolling, he looked at the stranger dubiously, uncertainly, suspiciously, meanwhile studying the stranger's yellow-back.

"You want me to git this here bill changed?" he said dully.

"That is the idea," said Judson Green, patiently. "You are to take it and change it—and I will trail behind you to see what happens. I'm merely making an experiment, with your help, and I'm willing to pay for it."

"This money ain't counterfeit?" inquired the raggedy one. "This ain't no game to git me in bad?"

"Well, isn't it worth taking a chance on?" cross-fired Green. The pimpled expanse of face lost some of its doubt, and the owner of the face fetched a deep breath.

"You're on," he decided. "Where'bouts'll I start?"

"Anywhere you please," Judson Green told him. "You said you were hungry—that for two days you hadn't eaten a bite?"

"Aw, boss, that was part of the spiel," he confessed frankly. "Right now I'm that full of beef stew I couldn't hold another bite."

"Well, how about a drink? A long, cool glass of beer, say? Or anything you please."

The temporary custodian of the one-thousand-dollar bill mentally considered this pleasing project; his bleared eye glinted brighter.

"Naw," he said, "not jist yit. If it's all the same to you, boss, I'll wait until I gits a good

thirst on me. I think I'll go into that show yonder, to start on." He pointed a finger towards a near-by amusement enterprise. This institution had opened years before as "The Galveston Flood." Then, with some small scenic changes, it had become "The Mount Pelee Disaster," warranted historically correct in all details; now it was "The Messina Earthquake," no less. Its red and gold gullet of an entrance yawned hungrily, not twenty yards from where they stood.

"Go ahead," ordered Judson Green, confirming the choice with a nod. "And remember, my friend, I will be right behind you."

Nothing, however, seemed further from the panhandler's thoughts than flight. His rags fluttered freely in the evening air and his soleless shoes flopped up and down upon his feet, rasping his bare toes, as he approached the nearest ticket booth.

Behind the wicket sat a young woman of much self-possession. By all the outward signs she was a born and bred metropolitan and therefore one steeled against surprise and armed mentally against trick and device. Even before she spoke you felt sure she would say *oily* if she meant *early*, and *early* if she meant *oily*—sure linguistic marks of the native-born New York cockney.

To match the environment of her employment she wore a costume that was fondly presumed to be the correct garbing of a Sicilian

peasant maid, including a brilliant bodice that laced in front and buttoned behind, an imposing headdress, and on both her arms, bracelets of the better known semi-precious metals.

Coming boldly up to her, the ragged man laid upon the shelf of the wicket his precious bill—it was now wadded into a greenish-yellow wisp like a sprig of celery top—and said simply, "One!"

With a jangle of her wrist jewelry, the young woman drew the bill in under the bars and straightened it out in front of her. She considered, with widening gaze, the numeral 1 and the three naughts following it. Then through the bars she considered carefully him who had brought it. From one to the other and back again she looked.

"Woit one minute," she said. It is impossible to reproduce in cold type the manner in which this young woman uttered the word *minute*. But there was an "o" in it and a labial hint of an extra "u."

"Woit, please," she said again, and holding the bill down flat with one hand she turned and beckoned to some one at her left.

A pace behind the panhandler, Judson Green watched. Now the big comedy scene was coming, just as it always came in the books. Either the tattered possessor of the one-thousand-dollar bill would be made welcome by a gratified proprietor and would be given the liberty of the entire island and would have columns

written about him by a hundred gratified press-agents, or else there would be a call for the police and for the first time in the history of New York a man would be locked up, not for the common crime of having no money, but for having too much money.

Obedient to the young woman's request, the panhandler waited. At her beck there came a stout person in a green coat and red trousers—Italian soldiers wear these colours, or at least they often do at Coney Island—and behind her free hand the young woman whispered in his ear. He nodded understandingly, cast a sharp look at the opulent individual in the brimless hat, and then hurried away toward the inner recesses of the entrance. In a minute he was back, but not with determined police officers behind him. He came alone and he carried in one hand a heavy canvas bag that gave off a muffled jingling sound, and in the other, a flat green packet.

The young woman riffled through the packet and drove a hand into the jingling bag. Briskly she counted down before her the following items in currency and specie:

Four one-hundred-dollar bills, six fifty-dollar bills, twelve twenty-dollar bills, five ten-dollar bills, one five-dollar bill, four one-dollar bills, one fifty-cent piece, one quarter, two dimes and one nickel. Lifting one of the dimes off the top of this pleasing structure, she dropped it in a drawer; then she shoved the remaining

mound of money under the wicket, accompanying it by a flat blue ticket of admission, whisked the one-thousand-dollar bill out of sight and calmly awaited the pleasure of the next comer.

All downcast and disappointed, Green drew his still bewildered accomplice aside, relieved him of the bulk of his double handful of change, endowed him liberally with cash for his trouble, and making his way to where his car waited, departed in haste and silence for Manhattan. A plan that was recommended by several of the leading fiction authorities as infallible, had absolutely failed him.

III

Other schemes proved equally disappointing. Choosing mainly the cool of the evening, he travelled the town from the primeval forests of the Farther Bronx to the sandy beaches of Ultimate Staten Island, which is in the city, and yet not of it. He roamed through queer streets and around quaint by-corners, and he learned much strange geography of his city and yet had no delectable adventures.

Once, acting on the inspiration of the plot of a popular novel that he had read at a sitting, he bought at an East Side pawnshop a strange badge, or token, of gold and black enamel, all mysteriously embossed over with intertwined Oriental signs and characters. Transferring this ornament from the pawnshop window to the lapel of his coat, he went walking first through the Syrian quarter, where the laces and the revolutionary plots come from, and then through the Armenian quarter, where the rugs come from, and finally in desperation through the Greek quarter, where the plaster statues and the ripe bananas come from.

By rights,—by all the rights of fiction,—he, wearing this jewelled emblem in plain sight, should have been hailed by a bearded foreigner and welcomed to the inner councils of some secret *Bund*, cabal, council or propaganda, as one coming from afar, bearing important mes-

sages. It should have turned out so, certainly. In this case, however, the sequel was very different and in a great measure disappointing.

A trifle foot-weary and decidedly overheated, young Mr. Green came out of the East Side by way of Nassau Street, and at Fulton turned north into Broadway. Just across from the old Astor House, a man wearing a stringy beard and a dusty black suit stood at the curbing, apparently waiting for a car. He carried an umbrella under one arm and at his feet rested a brown wicker suit-case with the initials "G. W. T." and the address, "Enid, Oklahoma," stencilled on its side in black letters. Plainly he was a stranger in the city. Between glances down the street to see whether his car was nearing him, he counted the upper stories of the near-by skyscrapers and gazed at the faces of those who streamed past him.

His roving eye fell upon a splendid badge of gold enamel gleaming against a background of blue serge, and his face lighted with the joy of one meeting a most dear friend in a distant land. Shifting his umbrella from the right hand to the left, he gave three successive and careful tugs at his right coat lapel, all the while facing Judson Green. Following this he made a military salute and then, stepping two paces forward, he undertook to engage Green's hand in a peculiar and difficult cross-fingered clasp. And he uttered cabalistic words of greeting in some strange tongue, all the while beaming gladly.

In less than no time, though, his warmth all changed to indignation; and as Green backed away, retreating in poor order and some embarrassment, he gathered from certain remarks thrown after him, that the outraged brother from Enid was threatening him with arrest and prosecution as a rank impostor—for wearing, without authority, the sacred insignia of an Imperial Past Potentate of the Supreme Order of Knightly Somethings or Other—he didn't catch the last words, being then in full flight. So the adventure-seeker counted that day lost too and buried the Oriental emblem at the bottom of a bureau drawer to keep it out of mischief.

He read the papers closely, seeking there the seeds of adventure. In one of them, a pathetic story appeared, telling of a once famous soldier of fortune starving in a tenement on Rivington Street, a man who in his day—so the papers said—had made rulers and unmade them, had helped to alter the map of more than one continent. Green investigated personally. The tale turned out to be nine-tenths reporter's imagination, and one-tenth, a garrulous, unreliable old man.

In another paper was an advertisement richly laden with veiled pleadings for immediate aid from a young woman who described herself as being in great danger. He looked into this too, but stopped looking, when he ran into an affable and accommodating press-agent. The imperilled

young lady was connected with the drama, it seemed, and she sought free advertisement and was willing to go pretty far to get it.

Coming away from a roof garden show one steaming night, a slinky-looking, slightly lame person asked Green for the time, and as Green reached for his watch he endeavoured to pick Green's pocket. Being thwarted in this, the slinky person made slowly off. A *Van Bibber* would have hired vigilant aides to dog the footsteps of the disappointed thief and by harrying him forth with threats from wherever he stopped, would speedily have driven him desperate from lack of sleep and lack of food. Green had read somewhere of this very thing having been done successfully. He patterned after the plan. He trailed the gimpy one to where he mainly abided and drove him out of one lunchroom, and dispossessed him from one lodging house; and at that, giving his pursuer malevolent looks, the "dip" went limping to the Grand Central and caught the first train leaving for the West.

And then, at the fag end of the summer, when all his well-laid plans had one by one gone agley, chance brought to Green an adventure—sheer chance and a real adventure. The circumstance of a deranged automobile was largely responsible—that and the added incident of a broken shoe-string.

IV

It was in the first week in September and Judson Green, a tired, badly sunburned young man, disappointed and fagged, looked forward ten days to the expiration of the three months, when confessing himself beaten, and what was worse, wrong, he must pay over one hundred dollars to the jubilant Wainright. With him it wasn't the money—he had already spent the amount of the wager several times over in the prosecution of his vain campaigning after adventure—it was the upsetting of his pet theory; that was the worst part of it.

I believe I stated a little earlier in this narrative that Judson Green was a young man of profoundly professed theories. It came to pass, therefore, that on the Saturday before Labour Day, Judson Green, being very much out of sorts, found himself very much alone and didn't know what to do with himself. He thought of the beaches, but dismissed the thought. Of a Saturday afternoon in the season, the sea beaches that lie within the city bounds are a-crawl with humans. There is small pleasure in surf-bathing where you must share every wave with from one to a dozen total strangers.

Mr. Green climbed into his car and told his driver to take him to Van Cortlandt Park, which, lying at the northernmost boundaries of

New York City, had come, with successive northerly shifts of the centre of population, to be the city's chief playground.

When, by reason of a confusion of tongues, work was knocked off on the Tower of Babel, if then all hands had turned to outdoor sports, the resultant scene would have been, I imagine, much like the picture that is presented on most Saturdays on the sixty-acre stretch of turf known as Indian Field, up in Van Cortlandt Park. Here there are baseball games by the hundred and football games by the score—all the known varieties of football games too, Gaelic, Soccer, Rugby and others; and coal black West Indian negroes in white flannels, with their legs buskined like the legs of comic opera brigands, play at cricket, meanwhile shouting in the broadest of British accents; and there is tennis on the tennis courts and boating on the lake near-by and golf on the links that lie beyond the lake. Also, in odd corners, there are all manners of queer Scandinavian and Latin games, for which no one seems to know the name; and on occasion, there are polo matches.

Accordingly, when his car drew up at the edge of the parking space, our young man beheld a wide assortment of sporting events spread before his eyes. The players disported themselves with enthusiasm, for there was now a soft coolness in the air. But the scars of a

brutal summer still showed, in the turf that was burnt brown and crisp, and in the withered leaves on the elms, and in white dust inches deep on the roadways.

Young Mr. Green sat at his ease and looked until he was tired of looking, and then he gave the order for a home-bound spin. Right here was where chanced stepped in and diverted him from his appointed paths. For the car, now turned cityward, had rolled but a few rods when a smell of overheated metals assailed the air, and with a tired wheezing somewhere down in its vital organs, the automobile halted itself. The chauffeur spent some time tinkering among its innermost works before he stood up, hot and sweaty and disgusted, to announce that the breakdown was serious in character. He undertook to explain in highly technical terms the exact nature of the trouble, but his master had no turn for mechanics and small patience for listening. He gathered that it would take at least an hour to mend the mishap, perhaps even longer, and he was not minded to wait.

"I'll walk across yonder and catch the subway," he said. "You mend the car and bring it downtown when you get it mended."

At its farthest point north, the Broadway subway, belying its name, emerges from the earth and becomes an elevated structure, rearing high above the ground. Its northernmost station stands aloft, butt-ended and pierced

with many windows, like a ferry-boat cabin set up on stilts. Through a long aisle of sun-dried trees, Judson Green made for this newly risen landmark. A year or two years before, all this district had been well wooded and sparsely inhabited. But wherever a transit line goes in New York it works changes in the immediate surroundings, and here at this particular spot, the subway was working them, and many of them. Through truck patches and strips of woodland, cross-streets were being cut, and on the hills to the westward, tall apartment houses were going up. On the raw edge of a cut, half of an old wooden mansion stood, showing tattered strips of an ancient flowered wallpaper and a fireplace, clinging like a chimney-swift's nest to a wall, where the rest of the room had been sheared away bodily. Along Broadway, beyond a huddle of merry-go-rounds and peanut stands, a row of shops had sprung up, as it were, overnight; they were shiny, trim, citified shops, looking a trifle strange now in this half-transformed setting, but sure to have plenty of neighbours before long. There was even a barber shop, glittering inside and out with the neatness of newness, and complete, even to a manicuring table and a shoe-shining stand. The door of the shop was open; within, electric fans whirred in little blurs of rapid movement.

See now how chance still served our young man: Crossing to the station, Judson Green

took note of this barber shop and took note also that his russet shoes had suffered from his trudge through the dusty park. Likewise one of the silken strings had frayed through; the broken end stood up through the top eyelet in an untidy fringed effect. So he turned off short and went into the little place and mounted the new tall chair that stood just inside the door. The only other customer in the place was in the act of leaving. This customer got up from the manicure table opposite the shoe-shining stand, slipped a coin into the palm of the manicure girl and passed out, giving Green a brief profile view of a thin, bearded face. Behind the back of her departing patron, the manicure girl shrugged her shoulders inside of an ornate bodice and screwed up her nose derisively. It was plainly to be seen that she did not care greatly for him she had just served.

From where he was languidly honing a razor, the head barber, he who presided over the first of the row of three chairs, spoke:

"You ought'nter be making faces at your regular steadies, Sadie. If you was to ask me, I think you've got a mash on that there gent."

The young person thus addressed shook her head with a sprightly motion.

"Not on your life," she answered. "There's certainly something about that man I don't like."

"It don't never pay to knock a stand-by," opined the head barber, banteringly.

As though seeking sympathy from these gibes, the young lady denominated as Sadie turned toward the well-dressed, alert-looking young man who had just come in. Apparently he impressed her as a person in whom she might confide.

"Speaking about the fella that just went out," she said. "August yonder is all the time trying to guy me about him. I should worry! He ain't my style. Honest, I think he's nutty."

Politely Green uttered one of those non-committal sounds that may be taken to mean almost anything. But the manicure lady was of a temperament needing no prompting. She went on, blithe to be talking to a new listener.

"Yes, sir, I think he's plumb dippy. He first came in here about two weeks ago to have his nails did, and I don't know whether you'll believe it or not—but August'll tell you it's the truth—he's been back here every day since. And the funniest part of it is I'm certain sure he never had his nails done in his life before then—they was certainly in a untidy state the first time he came. And there's another peculiar thing about him. He always makes me scrape away down under his nails, right to the quick. Sometimes they bleed and it must hurt him."

"Apparently the gentleman has the manicuring habit in a serious form," said Green, seeing that Miss Sadie had paused, in expectation of an answer from him.

"He sure has—in the most vi'lent form," she agreed. "He's got other habits too. He's sure badly stuck on the movies."

"I beg your pardon—on the what?"

"On the movies—the moving pictures," she explained. "Well, oncet in a while I enjoy a good fillum myself, but I'm no bigot on the subject—I can take my movies or I can let 'em be. But not that man that just now went out. All the time I'm doing his nails he don't talk about nothing else hardly, except the moving pictures, he's seen that day or the day before. It's right ridiculous, him being a grown-up man and everything. I actually believe he never misses a new fillum at that new moving picture place three doors above here, or at that other one, that's opened up down by Two Hundred an' Thirtieth Street. He seems to patronise just those two. I guess he lives 'round here somewhere. Yet he don't seem to be very well acquainted in this part of town neither. Well, it sure takes all kind of people to make a world, don't it?"

Temporarily Miss Sadie lapsed into silence, never noticing that what she said had caused her chief auditor to bend forward in absorbed interest. He sat with his eyes on the Greek

youth who worked over his shoes, but his mind was busy with certain most interesting speculations.

When the bootblack had given his restored and resplendent russets a final loving rub, and had deftly inserted a new lace where the old one had been, Mr. Green decided that he needed a manicure and he moved across the shop, and as the manicure lady worked upon his nails he siphoned the shallow reservoir of her little mind as dry as a bone. The job required no great amount of pump-work either, for this Miss Sadie dearly loved the sound of her own voice and was gratefully glad to tell him all she knew of the stranger who favoured such painful manicuring processes and who so enjoyed a moving picture show. For his part, Green had seen only the man's side face, and that casually and at a fleeting glance; but before the young lady was through with her description, he knew the other's deportment and contour as though he had passed him a hundred times and each time had closely studied him.

To begin with, the man was sallow and dark, and his age was perhaps thirty, or at most thirty-two or three. His beard was newly grown; it was a young beard, through which his chin and chops still showed. He smoked cigarettes constantly—the thumb and forefinger of his right hand were stained almost black, and Miss Sadie, having the pride of her craft, had

several times tried unsuccessfully to bleach them of their nicotine disfigurements.

He had a manner about him which the girl described as "kind of suspicious and scary,"—by which Green took her to mean that he was shy and perhaps furtive in his bearing. His teeth, his eyes, his expression, his mode of dress —Mr. Green knew them all before Miss Sadie gave his left hand a gentle pat as a sign that the job was concluded. He tipped her generously and caught the next subway train going south.

V

Southbound subway trains run fast, especially when the rush of traffic is northward. Within the hour Judson Green sat in the reading room of his club, industriously turning the pages of the club's file of the *World* for the past month. Presently he found what he was seeking. He read a while, and for a while then he took notes. Pocketing his notes, he ate dinner alone and in due season thereafter he went home and to bed. But before this, he sent off a night lettergram to the Byrnes private detective agency down in Park Row. He wanted—so in effect the message ran—the best man in the employ of that concern to call upon him at his bachelor apartments in the Hotel Sedgwick, in the morning at ten o'clock. The matter was urgent, important—and confidential.

If the man who knocked at Green's sitting-room door that next morning at ten was not the best man of the Byrnes staff he looked the part. He was square-jawed, with an appraising eye and a good pair of shoulders. He had the right kind of a name for a detective, too. The name was Cassidy—Michael J.

"Mr. Cassidy," said Judson Green, when the preliminaries of introduction were over, "you remember, don't you, what the papers said at the time of the Steinway murder about the

suspect Maxwell, the old man's nephew—the description they printed of him, and all?"

"I ought to," said Cassidy. "Our people had that case from the start—I worked on it myself off and on, up until three days ago." From memory he quoted: "Medium height, slender, dark-complected, smooth-faced and about thirty-one years old; a good dresser and well educated; smokes cigarettes constantly; has one upper front tooth crowned with gold—" He hesitated, searching his memory for more details.

"Remember anything else about him that was striking?" prompted Green.

"Let's see?" pondered Mr. Cassidy. Then after a little pause, "No, that's all I seem to recall right now."

"How about his being a patron of moving pictures?"

"That's right," agreed the other, "that's the only part of it I forgot." He repeated pretty exactly the language of the concluding paragraph of the official police circular that all the papers had carried for days: "Formerly addicted to reading cheap and sensational novels, now an inveterate attendant of motion-picture theatres." He glanced at Judson Green over his cigar. "What's the idea?" he asked. "Know something about this case?"

"Not much," said Green, "except that I have found the man who killed old Steinway."

Forgetting his professional gravity, up rose Mr. Cassidy, and his chair, which had been tilted back, brought its forelegs to the floor with a thump.

"No!" he said, half-incredulously, half-hopefully.

"Yes," stated Mr. Green calmly. "At least I've found Maxwell. Or anyway, I think I have."

Long before he was through telling what he had seen and heard the afternoon before, Mr. Cassidy, surnamed Michael J., was almost sitting in his lap. When the younger man had finished his tale the detective fetched a deep and happy breath.

"It sounds good to me," he commented, "it certainly sounds to me like you've got the right dope on this party. But listen, Mr. Green, how do you figure in this here party's fad for getting himself manicured as a part of the lay-out—I can see it all but that?"

"Here is how I deduced that element of the case," stated Green. "Conceding this man to be the fugitive Maxwell, it is quite evident that he has a highly developed imagination—his former love of trashy literature and his present passion for moving pictures would both seem to prove that. Now then, you remember that all the accounts of that murder told of the deep marks of finger-nail scratches in the old man's throat. If this man is the murderer, I would

say, from what we know of him, that he cannot rid himself of the feeling that the blood of his victim is still under his nails. And so, nursing that delusion, he goes daily to that manicure girl——"

He got no farther along than that. Mr. Cassidy extended his large right hand in a congratulatory clasp, and admiration was writ large upon his face.

"Colonel," he said, "you're immense—you oughter be in the business. Say, when are we going to nail this guy?"

"Well," said Green, "I think we should start watching his movements at once, but we should wait until we are pretty sure of the correctness of our theory before acting. And of course, in the meanwhile, we must deport ourselves in such a way as to avoid arousing his suspicions."

"Just leave that to me. You do the expert thinking on this here case; I'll guarantee a good job of trailing."

Inside of forty-eight hours these two, working discreetly, knew a good deal of their man. For example, they knew that under the name of Morrison he was living in a summer boarding house on a little hill rising to the west of the park; that he had been living there for a little more than a fortnight; that his landlady didn't know his business, but thought that he must be an invalid. Among the other lodgers

the impression prevailed that he suffered from a nervous trouble. Mornings, he kept to his room, sleeping until late. In fact, as well as the couple occupying the room below his might judge, he did most of his sleeping in the daytime—they heard him night after night, walking the floor until all hours.

A maid-servant of ultra conversational tendencies gratuitously furnished most of these valued details, after Michael J. Cassidy had succeeded in meeting her socially.

Afternoons, the suspect followed a more or less regular itinerary. He visited the manicure girl at the new barber shop; he patronized one or both of the moving picture places in the vicinity, but usually both, and then he went for a solitary walk through the park, and along toward dusk he returned to the boarding house, ate his supper and went to his room. He had no friends, apparently; certainly he had no callers. He received no letters and seemingly wrote none. Cassidy was convinced; he burned with eagerness to make the arrest without further delay. For this would be more than a feather in the Cassidy cap; it would be a whole war bonnet.

"You kin stay in the background if you want to," he said. "Believe me, I'm perfectly willing to take all the credit for pulling off this pinch."

As he said this they were passing along

Broadway just above the subway terminal. The straggling line of new shops was on one side and the park stretched away on the other. Green was on the inner side of the pavement. Getting no answer to his suggestion, Mr. Cassidy started to repeat it.

"I heard you," said Green, stopping now dead short, directly in front of the resplendent front of the Regal Motion Picture Palace. He contemplated with an apparently unwarranted interest the illuminated and lithographed announcements of the morrow's bill.

"I'm perfectly willing to stay in the background," he said. "But—but I've just this very minute thought of a plan that ought to make us absolutely sure of our man—providing the plan works! Are you at all familiar with the tragedy of 'Macbeth'?"

"I don't know as I am," admitted Mr. Cassidy honestly. "When did it happen and who done it?"

Again his employer seemed not to hear him.

"Let's go into this place," he said, turning in towards the hospitable portals of the Regal. "I want to have a business talk with the proprietor of this establishment, if he's in."

The manager was in, and they had their talk; but after all it was money—which in New York speaks with such a clarion-loud and convincing voice—that did most of the talking. As soon as Judson Green had produced a bill-roll of

august proportions, the proprietor, doubtful until that moment, showed himself to be a man open to all reasonable arguments. Moreover, he presently scented in this enterprise much free advertisement for his place.

VI

On the following afternoon, the weather being rainy, the Regal opened its doors for the three-o'clock performance to an audience that was smaller than common and mostly made up of dependable neighbourhood patrons. However, there were at least two newcomers present. They sat side by side, next to central aisle, in the rearmost row of chairs—Judson Green and Michael J. Cassidy. Their man was almost directly in front of them, perhaps halfway down toward the stage. Above a scattering line of heads of women and children they could see, in the half light of the darkened house, his head and shoulders as he bent his body forward at an interested angle.

Promptly on the hour, a big bull's-eye of light flashed on, making a shimmering white target in the middle of the screen. The music started up, and a moving-picture soloist with a moving-picture soloist's voice, appeared in the edge of the illuminated space and rendered a moving-picture ballad having reference to the joys of life down in Old Alabam', where the birds are forever singing in the trees and the cotton-blossoms bloom practically without cessation. This, mercifully, being soon over, a film entitled "The Sheriff's Sweetheart" was offered, and for a time, in shifting pictures,

horse-thieves in leather "chaps," and heroes in open-necked shirts, and dashing cow-girls in divided skirts, played out a thrilling drama of the West, while behind them danced and quivered a background labelled Arizona, but suggesting New Jersey. When the dashing and intrepid sheriff had, after many trials, won his lady love, the ballad singer again obliged throatily, and then from his coop in the little gallery the lantern man made an announcement, in large, flickering letters, of a film depicting William Shakespeare's play, "Macbeth."

Thereupon scene succeeded scene, unfolding the tragic tale. The ill-fated Duncan was slain; the Witches of Endor capered fearsomely about their fearsome cauldron of snaky, froggy horrors; and then—taking some liberties with the theme as set down by the original author—the operator presented a picture wherein Macbeth, tortured by sleeplessness and hag-ridden with remorse, saw, in imagination, the dripping blood upon his hands and vainly sought to scour it off.

Right here, too, came another innovation which might or might not have pleased the Bard of Avon. For as Macbeth wrestled with his fears, the phantom of the murdered Duncan, a cloaked, shadowy shape, crossed slowly by him from right to left, traversing the breadth of the screen, while the orchestra rendered shivery music in appropriate accompaniment.

Midway of the lighted space the ghost raised

its averted head and looked out full, not at the quivering Macbeth, but, with steady eyes and set, impassive face, into the body of the darkened little theatre. In an instant the sheeted form was gone—gone so quickly that perhaps no keen-eyed juvenile in the audience detected the artifice by which, through a skilful scissoring and grafting and doctoring of the original film, the face of the actor who played the dead and walking Duncan had been replaced by the photographed face, printed so often in the newspapers, of murdered Old Man Steinway!

There was a man near the centre of the house who got instantly upon his legs and stumbling, indeed almost running in his haste, made up the centre aisle for the door; and in the daylight which strengthened as he neared the open, it might be seen that he wore the look of one stunned by a sudden blighting shock. And at once Green and Cassidy were noisely up too, and following close behind him, their nerves a-tingle.

All unconscious of surveillance, the suspect was out of the door, on the pavement, when they closed on him. At the touch of Cassidy's big hand upon his shoulder he spun round, staring at them with wide-open, startled eyes. Above his scraggy beard his face was dappled white and red in patches, and under the mottled skin little muscles twitched visibly.

"What—what do you want?" he demanded in a shaken, quick voice. A gold-capped tooth showed in his upper jaw between his lips.

"We want a word or two with you," said Cassidy, with a sort of threatening emphasis.

"Are you—are you officers?" He got the question out with a separate gulp for each separate word.

"Not exactly," answered Cassidy, and tightened his grip on the other's shoulder the least bit more firmly. "But we can call one mighty easy if you ain't satisfied to talk to us a minute or two. There's one yonder."

He ducked his head toward where, forty yards distant, a middle-aged and somewhat pursy patrolman was shepherding the traffic that eddied in small whirls about the steps of the subway terminal.

"All right, all right," assented the captive eagerly. "I'll talk to you. Let's go over there—where it's quiet." He pointed a wavering finger, with a glistening, highly polished nail on it, toward the opposite side of the street; there the park came right up to the sidewalk and ended. They went, and in a minute all three of them were grouped close up to the shrub-lined boundary. The mottled-faced man was in the middle. Green stood on one side of him and Cassidy on the other, shouldering up so close that they blocked him off, flank and front.

"Now, then, we're all nice and cozy," said Cassidy with a touch of that irony which a cat often displays, in different form, upon capturing a live mouse. "And we want to ask you a few questions. What's your name—your real name?" he demanded roughly.

"Morrison," said the man, licking with his tongue to moisten his lips.

"Did you say Maxwell?" asked Cassidy, shooting out his syllables hard and straight.

"No, no—I said Morrison." The man looked as though he were going to collapse then and there.

"One name's as good as another, I guess, ain't it?" went on the detective. "Well, what's your business?"

"My business?" He was parrying as though seeking time to collect his scattered wits. "Oh, I haven't any business—I've been sick lately."

"Oh, you've been sick lately—well, you look sick right now." Cassidy shoved his hands in his pockets and with a bullying, hectoring air pushed his face, with the lower jaw undershot, into the suspect's face. "Say, was it because you felt sick that you came out of that there moving-picture show so sudden?"

Just as he had calculated, the other jumped at the suggestion.

"Yes—yes," he nodded nervously. "That was it—the heat in there made me faint." He

braced himself tauter. "Say," he said, and tried to put force into his tones, "what business have you men got spying on me and asking me these things? I'm a free American citizen——"

"Well now, young fellow, that all depends," broke in Cassidy, "that all depends." He sank his voice almost to a whisper, speaking deliberately. "Now tell us why you didn't feel real sick until you seen your dead uncle's face looking at you——"

"Look out!" screamed the prisoner. He flinched back, pointing with one arm wildly, and flinging up the other across his face as though to shut out a sight of danger. There was a rattle of wheels behind them.

Judson Green pivoted on his heel, with the thought of runaways springing up to his mind. But Mr. Cassidy, wiser in the tricks of the hunter and the hunted, made a darting grab with both hands for the shoulder which he had released. His greedy fingers closed on space. The suspect, with a desperate and unexpected agility, had given his body a backward nimble fling that carried him sprawling through a gap between the ornamental bushes fringing the park sward. Instantly he was up and, with never a backward glance, was running across the lower, narrower verge of Indian Field, making for the trees which edged it thickly upon the east. He could run fast, too. Nor were

there men in front to hinder him, since because of the rain, coming down in a thin drizzle, the wide, sloped stretch of turf was for this once bare of ball-players and cricket teams.

Upon the second, Cassidy was through the hedge gap and hot-foot after him, with Green coming along only a pace or two behind. Over his shoulder Cassidy whooped a call for aid to the traffic policeman in the roadway. But that stout person, who had been exiled to these far-away precincts by reason of his increasing girth and a tendency toward fallen arches, only took one or two steps upon his flat feet and then halted, being in doubt as to what it was all about. Before he could make up his mind whether or not to join the chase, it was too late to join it. The fugitive, travelling a straight course, had crossed the field at its narrowest point and had bounded into the fringe of greenery bordering the little lake, heading apparently for the thick swampy place lying between the ball ground and the golf links. The two pursuers, legging along behind, did their best to keep him in sight, but, one thing sure, they were not gaining on him.

As a matter of truth, they were losing. Twice they lost him and twice they spied him again—once crossing a bit of open glade, once weaving in and out among the tree trunks farther on. Then they lost him altogether. Cassidy had shown the better pair of legs at the

start of the race, but now his wind began to fail. Panting and blowing fit to shame porpoises, he slackened his speed, falling back inch by inch, while the slighter and younger man took the lead. Green settled to a steady, space-eating jog-trot, all the time watching this way and that. There were singularly few people in sight—only a chronic golfer here and there up on the links—and these incurables merely stared through the rain-drops at him as he forced his way among the thickets below them.

Cassidy, falling farther and farther behind, presently met a mounted policeman ambling his horse along a tree-shaded roadway that crossed the park from east to west, and between gulps for breath told what he knew. Leaning half out of his saddle, the mounted man listened, believed—and acted. Leaving Cassidy behind, he spurred his bay to a walloping gallop, aiming for the northern confines of the park, and as he travelled, he spread the alarm, gathering up for the man-chase such recruits as two park labourers and a park woodchopper and an automobile party of young men, so that presently there was quite a good-sized search party abroad in the woodland.

As for Judson Green, he played his hand out alone. Dripping wet with rain and his own sweat, he emerged from a mile-long thicket upon an asphalted drive that wound inter-

minably under the shouldering ledges of big gray rocks and among tall elms and oaks. Already he had lost his sense of direction, but he ran along the deserted road doggedly, pausing occasionally to peer among the tree trunks for a sight of his man. He thought, once, he heard a shot, but couldn't be sure, the sound seemed so muffled and so far away.

On a venture he left the road, taking to the woods again. He was working through a small green tangle when something caught at his right foot and he was spun about so that he faced the opposite direction from the one in which he had been travelling, and went down upon his hands and knees, almost touching with his head a big licheny boulder, half buried in vines and grass. Glancing back, he saw what had twisted him off his course and thrown him down—it was an upward-aimed tree-root, stubby and pointed, which had thrust itself through his right shoe lacing. The low shoe had been pulled half-way off his foot, and, under the strain, the silken lace had broken short off.

In the act of raising himself upright, he had straightened to a half-crouch when, just beyond the big green-masked boulder, he saw that which held him petrified in his pose. There, in a huddle among the shrubs, where he would never have seen it except for the chance shifting-about of his gaze, was the body of a man lying

face downward the head hidden under the upturned skirts of the coat.

He went to it and turned it over. It was the body of the man he sought—Maxwell—and there was a revolver in Maxwell's right hand and a hole in Maxwell's right temple, and Maxwell was dead.

Judson Green stood up and waited for the other pursuers. He had won a hundred-dollar bet and Cassidy had lost a thousand-dollar reward.

CHAPTER III

BOYS WILL BE BOYS

WHEN Judge Priest, on this particular morning, came puffing into his chambers at the courthouse, looking, with his broad beam and in his costume of flappy, loose white ducks, a good deal like an old-fashioned full-rigger with all sails set, his black shadow, Jeff Poindexter, had already finished the job of putting the quarters to rights for the day. The cedar water bucket had been properly replenished; the upper flange of a fifteen-cent chunk of ice protruded above the rim of the bucket; and alongside, on the appointed nail, hung the gourd dipper that the master always used. The floor had been swept, except, of course, in the corners and underneath things; there were evidences, in streaky scrolls of fine grit particles upon various flat surfaces, that a dusting brush had been more or less sparingly employed. A spray of trumpet flowers, plucked from the vine that grew outside the window, had been draped over the framed steel engrav-

ing of President Davis and his Cabinet upon the wall; and on the top of the big square desk in the middle of the room, where a small section of cleared green-blotter space formed an oasis in a dry and arid desert of cluttered law journals and dusty documents, the morning's mail rested in a little heap.

Having placed his old cotton umbrella in a corner, having removed his coat and hung it upon a peg behind the hall door, and having seen to it that a palm-leaf fan was in arm's reach should he require it, the Judge, in his billowy white shirt, sat down at his desk and gave his attention to his letters. There was an invitation from the Hylan B. Gracey Camp of Confederate Veterans of Eddyburg, asking him to deliver the chief oration at the annual reunion, to be held at Mineral Springs on the twelfth day of the following month; an official notice from the clerk of the Court of Appeals concerning the affirmation of a judgment that had been handed down by Judge Priest at the preceding term of his own court; a bill for five pounds of a special brand of smoking tobacco; a notice of a lodge meeting—altogether quite a sizable batch of mail.

At the bottom of the pile he came upon a long envelope addressed to him by his title, instead of by his name, and bearing on its upper right-hand corner several foreign-looking stamps; they were British stamps, he saw, on closer examination.

To the best of his recollection it had been a good long time since Judge Priest had had a communication by post from overseas. He adjusted his steel-bowed spectacles, ripped the wrapper with care and shook out the contents. There appeared to be several inclosures; in fact, there were several—a sheaf of printed forms, a document with seals attached, and a letter that covered two sheets of paper with typewritten lines. To the letter the recipient gave consideration first. Before he reached the end of the opening paragraph he uttered a profound grunt of surprise; his reading of the rest was frequently punctuated by small exclamations, his face meantime puckering up in interested lines. At the conclusion, when he came to the signature, he indulged himself in a soft low whistle. He read the letter all through again, and after that he examined the forms and the document which had accompanied it.

Chuckling under his breath, he wriggled himself free from the snug embrace of his chair arms and waddled out of his own office and down the long bare empty hall to the office of Sheriff Giles Birdsong. Within, that competent functionary, Deputy Sheriff Breck Quarles, sat at ease in his shirt sleeves, engaged, with the smaller blade of his pocketknife, in performing upon his finger nails an operation that combined the fine deftness of the manicure with the less delicate art of the farrier. At the

sight of the Judge in the open doorway he hastily withdrew from a tabletop, where they rested, a pair of long thin legs, and rose.

"Mornin', Breck," said Judge Priest to the other's salutation. "No, thank you, son, I won't come in; but I've got a little job fur you. I wisht, ef you ain't too busy, that you'd step down the street and see ef you can't find Peep O'Day fur me and fetch him back here with you. It won't take you long, will it?"

"No, suh—not very." Mr. Quarles reached for his hat and snuggled his shoulder holster back inside his unbuttoned waistcoat. "He'll most likely be down round Gafford's stable. Whut's Old Peep been doin', Judge—gettin' himself in contempt of court or somethin'?" He grinned, asking the question with the air of one making a little joke.

"No," vouchsafed the Judge; "he ain't done nothin'. But he's about to have somethin' of a highly onusual nature done to him. You jest tell him I'm wishful to see him right away—that'll be sufficient, I reckin."

Without making further explanation, Judge Priest returned to his chambers and for the third time read the letter from foreign parts. Court was not in session, and the hour was early and the weather was hot; nobody interrupted him. Perhaps fifteen minutes passed. Mr. Quarles poked his head in at the door.

"I found him, suh," the deputy stated. "He's outside here in the hall."

"Much obliged to you, son," said Judge Priest. "Send him on in, will you, please?"

The head was withdrawn; its owner lingered out of sight of His Honour, but within earshot. It was hard to figure the presiding judge of the First Judicial District of the state of Kentucky as having business with Peep O'Day; and, though Mr. Quarles was no eavesdropper, still he felt a pardonable curiosity in whatsoever might transpire. As he feigned an absorbed interest in a tax notice, which was pasted on a blackboard just outside the office door, there entered the presence of the Judge a man who seemingly was but a few years younger than the Judge himself—a man who looked to be somewhere between sixty-five and seventy. There is a look that you may have seen in the eyes of ownerless but well-intentioned dogs—dogs that, expecting kicks as their daily portion, are humbly grateful for kind words and stray bones; dogs that are fairly yearning to be adopted by somebody—by anybody—being prepared to give to such a benefactor a most faithful doglike devotion in return.

This look, which is fairly common among masterless and homeless dogs, is rare among humans; still, once in a while you do find it there too. The man who now timidly shuffled himself across the threshold of Judge Priest's office had such a look out of his eyes. He had a long, simple face, partly inclosed in grey

whiskers. Four dollars would have been a sufficient price to pay for the garments he stood in, including the wrecked hat he held in his hands and the broken, misshaped shoes on his feet. A purchaser who gave more than four dollars for the whole in its present state of decrepitude would have been but a poor hand at bargaining.

The man who wore this outfit coughed in an embarrassed fashion and halted, fumbling his ruinous hat in his hands.

"Howdy do?" said Judge Priest heartily. "Come in!"

The other diffidently advanced himself a yard or two.

"Excuse me, suh," he said apologetically; "but this here Breck Quarles he come after me and he said ez how you wanted to see me. 'Twas him ez brung me here, suh."

Faintly underlying the drawl of the speaker was just a suspicion—a mere trace, as you might say—of a labial softness that belongs solely and exclusively to the children, and in a diminishing degree to the grandchildren, of native-born sons and daughters of a certain small green isle in the sea. It was not so much a suggestion of a brogue as it was the suggestion of the ghost of a brogue; a brogue almost extinguished, almost obliterated, and yet persisting through the generations—South of Ireland struggling beneath south of Mason and Dixon's Line.

"Yes," said the Judge; "that's right. I do want to see you." The tone was one that he might employ in addressing a bashful child. "Set down there and make yourself at home."

The newcomer obeyed to the extent of perching himself on the extreme forward edge of a chair. His feet shuffled uneasily where they were drawn up against the cross rung of the chair.

The Judge reared well back, studying his visitor over the tops of his glasses with rather a quizzical look. In one hand he balanced the large envelope which had come to him that morning.

"Seems to me I heared somewheres, years back, that your regular Christian name was Paul—is that right?" he asked.

"Shorely is, suh," assented the ragged man, surprised and plainly grateful that one holding a supremely high position in the community should vouchsafe to remember a fact relating to so inconsequent an atom as himself. "But I ain't heared it fur so long I come mighty nigh furgittin' it sometimes, myself. You see, Judge Priest, when I wasn't nothin' but jest a shaver folks started in to callin' me Peep—on account of my last name bein' O'Day, I reckin. They been callin' me so ever since. Fust off, 'twas Little Peep, and then jest plain Peep; and now it's got to be Old Peep. But my real entitled name is Paul, jest like you said, Judge—Paul Felix O'Day."

"Uh-huh! And wasn't your father's name Philip and your mother's name Katherine Dwyer O'Day?"

"To the best of my recollection that's partly so, too, suh. They both of 'em up and died when I was a baby, long before I could remember anything a-tall. But they always told me my paw's name was Phil, or Philip. Only my maw's name wasn't Kath—Kath—wasn't whut you jest now called it, Judge. It was plain Kate."

"Kate or Katherine—it makes no great difference," explained Judge Priest. "I reckin the record is straight this fur. And now think hard and see ef you kin ever remember hearin' of an uncle named Daniel O'Day—your father's brother."

The answer was a shake of the tousled head.

"I don't know nothin' about my people. I only jest know they come over from some place with a funny name in the Old Country before I was born. The onliest kin I ever had over here was that there no-'count triflin' nephew of mine—Perce Dwyer—him that uster hang round this town. I reckin you call him to mind, Judge?"

The old Judge nodded before continuing:

"All the same, I reckin there ain't no manner of doubt but whut you had an uncle of the name of Daniel. All the evidences would seem to p'int that way. Accordin' to the

proofs, this here Uncle Daniel of yours lived in a little town called Kilmare, in Ireland." He glanced at one of the papers that lay on his desktop; then added in a casual tone: "Tell me, Peep, whut are you doin' now fur a livin'?"

The object of this examination grinned a faint grin of extenuation.

"Well, suh, I'm knockin' about, doin' the best I kin—which ain't much. I help out round Gafford's liver' stable, and Pete Gafford he lets me sleep in a little room behind the feed room, and his wife she gives me my vittles. Oncet in a while I git a chancet to do odd jobs fur folks round town—cuttin' weeds and splittin' stove wood and packin' in coal, and sech ez that."

"Not much money in it, is there?"

"No, suh; not much. Folks is more prone to offer me old clothes than they are to pay me in cash. Still, I manage to git along. I don't live very fancy; but, then, I don't starve, and that's more'n some kin say."

"Peep, whut was the most money you ever had in your life—at one time?"

Peep scratched with a freckled hand at his thatch of faded whitish hair to stimulate recollection.

"I reckin not more'n six bits at any one time, suh. Seems like I've sorter got the knack of livin' without money."

"Well, Peep, sech bein' the case, whut would

you say ef I was to tell you that you're a rich man?"

The answer came slowly.

"I reckin, suh, ef it didn't sound disrespectful, I'd say you was prankin' with me—makin' fun of me, suh."

Judge Priest bent forward in his chair.

"I'm not prankin' with you. It's my pleasant duty to inform you that at this moment you are the rightful owner of eight thousand pounds."

"Pounds of whut, Judge?" The tone expressed a heavy incredulity.

"Why, pounds in money."

Outside, in the hall, with one ear held conveniently near the crack in the door, Deputy Sheriff Quarles gave a violent start; and then, at once, was torn between a desire to stay and hear more and an urge to hurry forth and spread the unbelievable tidings. After the briefest of struggles the latter inclination won; this news was too marvellously good to keep; surely a harbinger and a herald was needed to spread it broadcast.

Mr. Quarles tiptoed rapidly down the hall. When he reached the sidewalk the volunteer bearer of a miraculous tale fairly ran. As for the man who sat facing the Judge, he merely stared in a dull bewilderment.

"Judge," he said at length, "eight thousand pounds of money oughter make a powerful big pile, oughten it?"

"It wouldn't weigh quite that much ef you put it on the scales," explained His Honour painstakingly. "I mean pounds sterlin'—English money. Near ez I kin figger offhand, it comes in our money to somewheres between thirty-five and forty thousand dollars—nearer forty than thirty-five. And it's all yours, Peep—every red cent of it."

"Excuse me, suh, and not meanin' to contradict you, or nothin' like that; but I reckin there must be some mistake. Why, Judge, I don't scursely know anybody that's ez wealthy ez all that, let alone anybody that'd give me sech a lot of money."

"Listen, Peep: This here letter I'm holdin' in my hand came to me by to-day's mail—jest a little spell ago. It's frum Ireland—frum the town of Kilmare, where your people came frum. It was sent to me by a firm of barristers in that town—lawyers we'd call 'em. In this letter they ask me to find you and to tell you whut's happened. It seems, frum whut they write, that your uncle, by name Daniel O'Day, died not very long ago without issue—that is to say, without leavin' any children of his own, and without makin' any will.

"It appears he had eight thousand pounds saved up. Ever since he died those lawyers and some other folks over there in Ireland have been tryin' to find out who that money should go to. They learnt in some way that your father and your mother settled in this

town a mighty long time ago, and that they died here and left one son, which is you. All the rest of the family over there in Ireland have already died out, it seems; that natchelly makes you the next of kin and the heir at law, which means that all your uncle's money comes direct to you.

"So, Peep, you're a wealthy man in your own name. That's the news I had to tell you. Allow me to congratulate you on your good fortune."

The beneficiary rose to his feet, seeming not to see the hand the old Judge had extended across the desktop toward him. On his face, of a sudden, was a queer, eager look. It was as though he foresaw the coming true of long-cherished and heretofore unattainable visions.

"Have you got it here, suh?"

He glanced about him as though expecting to see a bulky bundle. Judge Priest smiled.

"Oh, no; they didn't send it along with the letter—that wouldn't be regular. There's quite a lot of things to be done fust. There'll be some proofs to be got up and sworn to before a man called a British consul; and likely there'll be a lot of papers that you'll have to sign; and then all the papers and the proofs and things will be sent acrost the ocean. And, after some fees are paid out over there—why, then you'll git your inheritance."

The rapt look faded from the strained face, leaving it downcast. "I'm afeared, then, I

won't be able to claim that there money," he said forlornly.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't know how to sign my own name. Raised the way I was, I never got no book learnin'. I can't neither read nor write."

Compassion shadowed the Judge's chubby face; and compassion was in his voice as he made answer:

"You don't need to worry about that part of it. You can make your mark—just a cross mark on the paper, with witnesses present—like this."

He took up a pen, dipped it in the ink-well and illustrated his meaning.

"Yes, suh; I'm glad it kin be done thataway. I always wisht I knowed how to read big print and spell my own name out. I ast a feller oncet to write my name out fur me in plain letters on a piece of paper. I was aimin' to learn to copy it off; but I showed it to one of the hands at the liver' stable and he busted out laughin'. And then I come to find out this here feller had tricked me fur to make game of me. He hadn't wrote my name out a-tall—he'd wrote some dirty words instid. So after that I give up tryin' to educate myself. That was several years back and I ain't tried sence. Now I reckin I'm too old to learn. . . . I wonder, suh—I wonder ef it'll be very long before that there money gits here and I begin to have the spendin' of it?"

"Makin' plans already?"

"Yes, suh," O'Day answered truthfully; "I am." He was silent for a moment, his eyes on the floor; then timidly he advanced the thought that had come to him: "I reckin, suh, it wouldn't be no more'n fair and proper ef I divided my money with you to pay you back fur all this trouble you're fixin' to take on my account. Would—would half of it be enough? The other half oughter last me fur whut uses I'll make of it."

"I know you mean well and I'm much obliged to you fur your offer," stated Judge Priest, smiling a little; "but it wouldn't be fittin' or proper fur me to tech a cent of your money. There'll be some court dues and some lawyers' fees, and sech, to pay over there in Ireland; but after that's settled up everything comes direct to you. It's goin' to be a pleasure to me to help you arrange these here details that you don't understand—a pleasure and not a burden."

He considered the figure before him.

"Now here's another thing, Peep: I judge it's hardly fittin' fur a man of substance to go on livin' the way you've had to live durin' your life. Ef you don't mind my offerin' you a little advice I would suggest that you go right down to Felsburg Brothers when you leave here and git yourself fitted out with some suitable clothin'. And you'd better go to Max Biederman's, too, and order a better pair of shoes fur

yourself than them you've got on. Tell 'em I sent you and that I guarantee the payment of your bills. Though I reckin that'll hardly be necessary—when the news of your good luck gits noised round I misdoubt whether there's any firm in our entire city that wouldn't be glad to have you on their books fur a stiddy customer.

"And, also, ef I was you I'd arrange to git me regular board and lodgin's somewheres round town. You see, Peep, comin' into a property entails consider'ble many responsibilities right frum the start."

"Yes, suh," assented the legatee obediently. "I'll do jest ez you say, Judge Priest, about the clothes and the shoes, and all that; but—but, ef you don't mind, I'd like to go on livin' at Gafford's. Pete Gafford's been mighty good to me—him and his wife both; and I wouldn't like fur 'em to think I was gittin' stuck up jest because I've had this here streak of luck come to me. Mebbe, seein' ez how things has changed with me, they'd be willin' to take me in fur a table boarder at their house; but I shorely would hate to give up livin' in that there little room behind the feed room at the liver' stable. I don't know ez I could ever find any place that would seem ez homelike to me ez whut it is."

"Suit yourself about that," said Judge Priest heartily. "I don't know but whut you've got the proper notion about it after all."

"Yes, suh. Them Gaffords have been purty

nigh the only real true friends I ever had that I could count on." He hesitated a moment. "I reckin—I reckin, suh, it'll be a right smart while, won't it, before that money gits here frum all the way acrost the ocean?"

"Why, yes; I imagine it will. Was you figurin' on investin' a little of it now?"

"Yes, suh; I was."

"About how much did you think of spendin' fur a beginnin'?"

O'Day squinted his eyes, his lips moving in silent calculation.

"Well, suh," he said at length, "I could use ez much ez a silver dollar. But, of course, sence——"

"That sounds kind of moderate to me," broke in Judge Priest. He shoved a pudgy hand into a pocket of his white trousers. "I reckin this detail kin be arranged. Here, Peep"—he extended his hand—"here's your dollar." Then, as the other drew back, stammering a refusal, he hastily added: "No, no, no; go ahead and take it—it's yours. I'm jest advancin' it to you out of whut'll be comin' to you shortly.

"I'll tell you whut: Until sech time ez you are in position to draw on your own funds you jest drap in here to see me when you're in need of cash, and I'll try to let you have whut you require—in reason. I'll keep a proper reckinin' of whut you git and you kin pay me back ez soon ez your inheritance is put into your hands.

"One thing more," he added as the heir, having thanked him, was making his grateful adieu at the threshold: "Now that you're wealthy, or about to be so, I kind of imagine quite a passel of fellers will suddenly discover themselves strangely and affectionately drawed toward you. You're liable to find out you've always had more true and devoted friends in this community than whut you ever imagined to be the case before.

"Now friendship is a mighty fine thing, takin' it by and large; but it kin be overdone. It's barely possible that some of this here new crop of your well-wishers and admirers will be makin' little business propositions to you—desirin' to have you go partners with 'em in business, or to sell you desirable pieces of real estate; or even to let you loan 'em various sums of money. I wouldn't be surprised but whut a number of sech chances will be comin' your way durin' the next few days, and frum then on. Ef sech should be the case I would suggest to you that, before committin' yourself to anybody or anything, you tell 'em that I'm sort of actin' as your unofficial adviser in money matters, and that they should come to me and outline their little schemes in person. Do you git my general drift?"

"Yes, suh," said Peep. "I won't furgit; and thank you ag'in, Judge, specially fur lettin' me have this dollar ahead of time."

He shambled out with the coin in his hand;

and on his face was again the look of one who sees before him the immediate fulfillment of a delectable dream.

With lines of sympathy and amusement crisscrossing at the outer corners of his eyelids, Judge Priest, rising and stepping to his door, watched the retreating figure of the town's newest and strangest capitalist disappear down the wide front steps of the courthouse.

Presently he went back to his chair and sat down, tugging at his short chin beard.

"I wonder, now," said he, meditatively addressing the emptiness of the room, "I wonder whut a man sixty-odd-year old is goin' to do with the fust whole dollar he ever had in his life!"

It was characteristic of our circuit judge that he should have voiced his curiosity aloud. Talking to himself when he was alone was one of his habits. Also, it was characteristic of him that he had refrained from betraying his inquisitiveness to his late caller. Similar motives of delicacy had kept him from following the other man to watch the sequence.

However, at secondhand, the details very shortly reached him. They were brought by no less a person than Deputy Sheriff Quarles, who, some twenty minutes or possibly half an hour later, obtruded himself upon Judge Priest's presence.

"Judge," began Mr. Quarles, "you'd never in the world guess whut Old Peep O'Day done

with the first piece of money he got his hands on out of that there forty thousand pounds of silver dollars he's come into frum his uncle's estate."

The old man slanted a keen glance in Mr. Quarles' direction.

"Tell me, son," he asked softly, "how did you come to hear the glad tidin's so promptly?"

"Me?" said Mr. Quarles innocently. "Why, Judge Priest, the word is all over this part of town by this time. Why, I reckin twenty-five or fifty people must 'a' been watchin' Old Peep to see how he was goin' to act when he come out of this courthouse."

"Well, well, well!" murmured the Judge blandly. "Good news travels almost ez fast sometimes ez whut bad news does—don't it, now? Well, son, I give up the riddle. Tell me jest whut our elderly friend did do with the first installment of his inheritance."

"Well, suh, he turned south here at the gate and went down the street, a-lookin' neither to the right nor the left. He looked to me like a man in a trance, almost. He keeps right on through Legal Row till he comes to Franklin Street, and then he goes up Franklin to B. Weil & Son's confectionary store; and there he turns in. I happened to be followin' 'long behind him, with a few others—with several others, in fact—and we-all sort of slowed up in passin' and looked in at the door; and that's how I come to be in a position to see whut happened.

"Old Peep, he marches in jest like I'm tellin' it to you, suh; and Mr. B. Weil comes to wait on him, and he starts in buyin'. He buys hisself a five-cent bag of gumdrops; and a five-cent bag of jelly beans; and a ten-cent bag of mixed candies—kisses and candy mottoes, and sech ez them, you know; and a sack of fresh roasted peanuts—a big sack, it was, fifteen-cent size; and two prize boxes; and some gingersnaps—ten cents' worth; and a coconut; and half a dozen red bananas; and half a dozen more of the plain yaller ones. Altogether I figger he spent a even dollar; in fact, I seen him hand Mr. Weil a dollar, and I didn't see him gittin' no change back out of it.

"Then he comes on out of the store, with all these things stuck in his pockets and stacked up in his arms till he looks sort of like some new kind of a summertime Santy Klaws; and he sets down on a goods box at the edge of the pavement, with his feet in the gutter, and starts in eatin' all them things.

"First, he takes a bite off a yaller banana and then off a red banana, and then a mouthful of peanuts; and then maybe some mixed candies—not sayin' a word to nobody, but jest natchelly eatin' his fool head off. A young chap that's clerkin' in Bagby's grocery, next door, steps up to him and speaks to him, meanin', I suppose, to ast him is it true he's wealthy. And Old Peep says to him, 'Please don't come botherin' me now, sonny—I'm

busy ketchin' up,' he says; and keeps right on a-munchin' and a-chewin' like all possessed.

"That ain't all of it, neither, Judge—not by a long shot it ain't! Purty soon Old Peep looks round him at the little crowd that's gathered. He didn't seem to pay no heed to the grown-up people standin' there; but he sees a couple of boys about ten years old in the crowd, and he beckons to them to come to him, and he makes room fur them alongside him on the box and divides up his knick-knacks with them.

"When I left there to come on back here he had no less'n six kids squatted round him, includin' one little nigger boy; and between 'em all they'd jest finished up the last of the bananas and peanuts and the candy and the gingersnaps, and was fixin' to take turns drinkin' the milk out of the coconut. I s'pose they've got it all cracked out of the shell and et up by now—the coconut, I mean. Judge, you oughter stepped down into Franklin Street and taken a look at the picture whilst there was still time. You never seen sech a funny sight in all your days, I'll bet!"

"I reckin 'twould be too late to be startin' now," said Judge Priest. "I'm right sorry I missed it. . . . Busy ketchin' up, huh? Yes; I reckin he is. . . . Tell me, son, whut did you make out of the way Peep O'Day acted?"

"Why, suh," stated Mr. Quarles, "to my mind, Judge, there ain't no manner of doubt

but whut prosperity has went to his head and turned it. He acted to me like a plum' distracted idiot. A grown man with forty thousand pounds of solid money settin' on the side of a gutter eatin' jimcracks with a passel of dirty little boys! Kin you figure it out any other way, Judge—except that his mind is gone?"

"I don't set myself up to be a specialist in mental disorders, son," said Judge Priest softly; "but, sence you ask me the question, I should say, speakin' offhand, that it looks to me more ez ef the heart was the organ that was mainly affected. And possibly"—he added this last with a dry little smile—"and possibly, by now, the stomach also."

Whether or not Mr. Quarles was correct in his psychopathic diagnosis, he certainly had been right when he told Judge Priest that the word was already all over the business district. It had spread fast and was still spreading; it spread to beat the wireless, travelling as it did by that mouth-to-ear method of communication which is so amazingly swift and generally as tremendously incorrect. Persons who could not credit the tale at all, nevertheless lost no time in giving to it a yet wider circulation; so that, as though borne on the wind, it moved in every direction, like ripples on a pond; and with each time of retelling the size of the legacy grew.

The *Daily Evening News*, appearing on the streets at 5 P. M., confirmed the tale; though by its account the fortune was reduced to a sum far below the gorgeously exaggerated estimates of most of the earlier narrators. Between breakfast and supper-time Peep O'Day's position in the common estimation of his fellow citizens underwent a radical and revolutionary change. He ceased—automatically, as it were—to be a town character; he became, by universal consent, a town notable, whose every act and every word would thereafter be subjected to close scrutiny and closer analysis.

The next morning the nation at large had opportunity to know of the great good fortune that had befallen Paul Felix O'Day, for the story had been wired to the city papers by the local correspondents of the same; and the press associations had picked up a stickful of the story and sped it broadcast over leased wires. Many who until that day had never heard of the fortunate man, or, indeed, of the place where he lived, at once manifested a concern in his well-being.

Certain firms of investment brokers in New York and Chicago promptly added a new name to what vulgarly they called their "sucker" lists. Dealers in mining stocks, in oil stocks, in all kinds of attractive stocks, showed interest; in circular form samples of the most optimistic and alluring literature the

world has ever known were consigned to the post, addressed to Mr. P. F. O'Day, such-and-such a town, such-and-such a state, care of general delivery.

Various lonesome ladies in various lonesome places lost no time in sitting themselves down and inditing congratulatory letters; object matrimony. Some of these were single ladies; others had been widowed, either by death or request. Various other persons of both sexes, residing here, there and elsewhere in our country, suddenly remembered that they, too, were descended from the O'Days of Ireland, and wrote on forthwith to claim proud and fond relationship with the particular O'Day who had come into money.

It was a remarkable circumstance, which instantly developed, that one man should have so many distant cousins scattered over the Union, and a thing equally noteworthy that practically all these kinspeople, through no fault of their own, should at the present moment be in such straitened circumstances and in such dire need of temporary assistance of a financial nature. Ticker and printer's ink, operating in conjunction, certainly did their work mighty well; even so, several days were to elapse before the news reached one who, of all those who read it, had most cause to feel a profound personal sensation in the intelligence.

This delay, however, was nowise to be

blamed upon the tardiness of the newspapers; it was occasioned by the fact that the person referred to was for the moment well out of touch with the active currents of world affairs, he being confined in a workhouse at Evansville, Indiana.

As soon as he had rallied from the shock this individual set about making plans to put himself in direct touch with the inheritor. He had ample time in which to frame and shape his campaign, inasmuch as there remained for him yet to serve nearly eight long and painfully tedious weeks of a three-months' vagrancy sentence. Unlike most of those now manifesting their interest, he did not write a letter; but he dreamed dreams that made him forget the annoyances of a ball and chain fast on his ankle and piles of stubborn stones to be cracked up into fine bits with a heavy hammer.

We are getting ahead of our narrative, though—days ahead of it. The chronological sequence of events properly dates from the morning following the morning when Peep O'Day, having been abruptly translated from the masses of the penniless to the classes of the wealthy, had forthwith embarked upon the gastronomic orgy so graphically detailed by Deputy Sheriff Quarles.

On that next day more eyes probably than had been trained in Peep O'Day's direction in all the unremarked and unremarkable days of his life put together were focused upon him.

Persons who theretofore had regarded his existence—if indeed they gave it a thought—as one of the utterly trivial and inconsequential incidents of the cosmic scheme, were moved to speak to him, to clasp his hand, and, in numerous instances, to express a hearty satisfaction over his altered circumstances. To all these, whether they were moved by mere neighbourly good will, or perchance were inspired by impulses of selfishness, the old man exhibited a mien of aloofness and embarrassment.

This diffidence or this suspicion—or this whatever it was—protected him from those who might entertain covetous and ulterior designs upon his inheritance even better than though he had been brusque and rude; while those who sought to question him regarding his plans for the future drew from him only mumbled and evasive replies, which left them as deeply in the dark as they had been before. Altogether, in his intercourse with adults he appeared shy and very ill at ease.

It was noted, though, that early in the forenoon he attached to him perhaps half a dozen urchins, of whom the oldest could scarcely have been more than twelve or thirteen years of age; and that these youngsters remained his companions throughout the day. Likewise the events of that day were such as to confirm a majority of the observers in practically the same belief that had been voiced by Mr. Quarles—namely, that whatever scanty brains

Peep O'Day might have ever had were now completely ruined by the stroke of luck that had befallen him.

In fairness to all—to O'Day and to the town critics who sat in judgment upon his behaviour—it should be stated that his conduct at the very outset was not entirely devoid of evidences of sanity. With his troupe of ragged juveniles trailing behind him, he first visited Felsburg Brothers' Emporium to exchange his old and disreputable costume for a wardrobe that, in accordance with Judge Priest's recommendation, he had ordered on the afternoon previous, and which had since been undergoing certain necessary alterations.

With his meagre frame incased in new black woollens, and wearing, as an incongruous added touch, the most brilliant of neckties, a necktie of the shade of a pomegranate blossom, he presently issued from Felsburg Brothers' and entered M. Biederman's shoe store, two doors below. Here Mr. Biederman fitted him with shoes, and in addition noted down a further order, which the purchaser did not give until after he had conferred earnestly with the members of his youthful entourage.

Those watching this scene from a distance saw—and perhaps marvelled at the sight—that already, between these small boys, on the one part, and this old man, on the other, a perfect understanding appeared to have been established.

After leaving Biederman's, and tagged by his small escorts, O'Day went straight to the courthouse and, upon knocking at the door, was admitted to Judge Priest's private chambers, the boys meantime waiting outside in the hall. When he came forth he showed them something he held in his hand and told them something; whereupon all of them burst into excited and joyous whoops.

It was at that point that O'Day, by the common verdict of most grown-up onlookers, began to betray the vagaries of a disordered intellect. Not that his reason had not been under suspicion already, as a result of his freakish excess in the matter of B. Weil & Son's wares on the preceding day; but the relapse that now followed, as nearly everybody agreed, was even more pronounced, even more symptomatic than the earlier attack of aberration.

In brief, this was what happened: To begin with, Mr. Virgil Overall, who dealt in lands and houses and sold insurance of all the commoner varieties on the side, had stalked O'Day to this point and was lying in wait for him as he came out of the courthouse into the Public Square, being anxious to describe to him some especially desirable bargains, in both improved and unimproved realty; also, Mr. Overall was prepared to book him for life, accident and health policies on the spot.

So pleased was Mr. Overall at having dis-

tanced his professional rivals in the hunt that he dribbled at the mouth. But the warmth of his disappointment and indignation dried up the salivary founts instantly when the prospective patron declined to listen to him at all and, breaking free from Mr. Overall's detaining clasp, hurried on into Legal Row, with his small convoys trotting along ahead and alongside him.

At the door of the Blue Goose Saloon and Short Order Restaurant its proprietor, by name Link Iserman, was lurking, as it were, in ambush. He hailed the approaching O'Day most cordially; he inquired in a warm voice regarding O'Day's health; and then, with a rare burst of generosity, he invited, nay urged, O'Day to step inside and have something on the house—wines, ales, liquors or cigars; it was all one to Mr. Iserman. The other merely shook his head and, without a word of thanks for the offer, passed on as though bent upon an important mission.

Mark how the proofs were accumulating: The man had disdained the company of men of approximately his own age or thereabout; he had refused an opportunity to partake of refreshment suitable to his years; and now he stepped into the Bon Ton toy store and bought for cash—most inconceivable of acquisitions!—a little wagon that was painted bright red and bore on its sides, in curlicued letters, the name Comet.

His next stop was made at Bishop & Bryan's grocery, where, with the aid of his youthful compatriots, he first discriminatingly selected, and then purchased on credit, and finally loaded into the wagon, such purchases as a dozen bottles of soda pop, assorted flavours; cheese, crackers—soda and animal; sponge cakes with weather-proof pink icing on them; fruits of the season; cove oysters; a bottle of pepper sauce; and a quantity of the extra large sized bright green cucumber pickles known to the trade as the Fancy Jumbo Brand, Prime Selected.

Presently the astounding spectacle was presented of two small boys, with string bridles on their arms, drawing the wagon through our town and out of it into the country, with Peep O'Day in the rôle of teamster walking alongside the laden wagon. He was holding the lines in his hands and shouting orders at his team, who showed a colty inclination to shy at objects, to kick up their heels without provocation, and at intervals to try to run away. Eight or ten small boys—for by now the troupe had grown in number and in volume of noise—trailed along, keeping step with their elderly patron and advising him shrilly regarding the management of his refractory span.

As it turned out, the destination of this preposterous procession was Bradshaw's Grove, where the entire party spent the day picnicking in the woods and, as reported by several

reliable witnesses, playing games. It was not so strange that holidaying boys should play games; the amazing feature of the performance was that Peep O'Day, a man old enough to be grandfather to any of them, played with them, being by turns an Indian chief, a robber baron, and the driver of a stagecoach attacked by Wild Western desperadoes.

When he returned to town at dusk, drawing his little red wagon behind him, his new suit was rumpled into many wrinkles and marked by dust and grass stains; his flame-coloured tie was twisted under one ear; his new straw hat was mashed quite out of shape; and in his eyes was a light that sundry citizens, on meeting him, could only interpret to be a spark struck from inner fires of madness.

Days that came after this, on through the midsummer, were, with variations, but repetitions of the day I have just described. Each morning Peep O'Day would go to either the courthouse or Judge Priest's home to turn over to the Judge the unopened mail which had been delivered to him at Gafford's stables; then he would secure from the Judge a loan of money against his inheritance. Generally the amount of his daily borrowing was a dollar; rarely was it so much as two dollars; and only once was it more than two dollars.

By nightfall the sum would have been expended upon perfectly useless and absolutely childish devices. It might be that he would

buy toy pistols and paper caps for himself and his following of urchins; or that his whim would lead him to expend all the money in tin flutes. In one case the group he so incongruously headed would be for that one day a gang of make-believe banditti; in another, they would constitute themselves a fife-and-drum corps—with barreltops for the drums—and would march through the streets, where scandalised adults stood in their tracks to watch them go by, they all the while making weird sounds, which with them passed for music.

Or again, the available cash resources would be invested in provender; and then there would be an outing in the woods. Under Peep O'Day's captaincy his chosen band of youngsters picked dewberries; they went swimming together in Guthrie's Gravel Pit, out by the old Fair Grounds, where his spare naked shanks contrasted strongly with their plump freckled legs as all of them splashed through the shallows, making for deep water. Under his leadership they stole watermelons from Mr. Dick Bell's patch, afterward eating their spoils in thickets of grapevines along the banks of Perkins' Creek.

It was felt that mental befuddlement and mortal folly could reach no greater heights—or no lower depths—than on a certain hour of a certain day, along toward the end of August, when O'Day came forth from his quarters in Gafford's stables, wearing a pair of boots that M. Biederman's establishment had turned out

to his order and his measure—not such boots as a sensible man might be expected to wear, but boots that were exaggerated and monstrous counterfeits of the red-topped, scroll-fronted, brass-toed, stub-heeled, squeaky-soled bootees that small boys of an earlier generation possessed.

Very proudly and seemingly unconscious of or, at least, oblivious to the derisive remarks that the appearance of these new belongings drew from many persons, the owner went clumping about in them, with the rumply legs of his trousers tucked down in them, and ballooning up and out over the tops in folds which overlapped from his knee joints halfway down his attenuated calves.

As Deputy Sheriff Quarles said, the combination was a sight fit to make a horse laugh. It may be that small boys have a lesser sense of humour than horses have, for certainly the boys who were the old man's invariable shadows did not laugh at him, or at his boots either.

Between the whiskered senior and his small comrades there existed a freemasonry that made them all sense a thing beyond the ken of most of their elders. Perhaps this was because the elders, being blind in their superior wisdom, saw neither this thing nor the communion that flourished. They saw only the farcical joke. But His Honour, Judge Priest, to cite a conspicuous exception, seemed not to see the lamentable comedy of it.

Indeed, it seemed to some almost as if Judge Priest were aiding and abetting the befogged O'Day in his demented enterprises, his peculiar excursions and his weird purchases. If he did not actually encourage him in these constant exhibitions of witlessness, certainly there were no evidences available to show that he sought to dissuade O'Day from his strange course.

At the end of a fortnight one citizen, in whom patience had ceased to be a virtue and to whose nature long-continued silence on any public topic was intolerable, felt it his duty to speak to the Judge upon the subject. This gentleman—his name was S. P. Escott—held, with others, that, for the good name of the community, steps should be taken to abate the infantile, futile activities of the besotted legatee.

Afterward Mr. Escott, giving a partial account of the conversation with Judge Priest to certain of his friends, showed unfeigned annoyance at the outcome.

"I claim that old man's not fittin' to be runnin' a court any longer," he stated bitterly. "He's too old and peevish—that's whut ails him! Fur one, I'm certainly not never goin' to vote fur him again. Why, it's gettin' to be ez much ez a man's life is worth to stop that there spiteful old crank on the street and put a civil question to him—that's whut's the matter!"

"What happened, S. P.?" inquired someone.

"Why, here's whut happened!" exclaimed

the aggrieved Mr. Escott. "I hadn't any more than started in to tell him the whole town was talkin' about the way that daffy Old Peep O'Day was carryin' on, and that somethin' had oughter be done about it, and didn't he think it was beholdin' on him ez circuit judge to do somethin' right away, sech ez havin' O'Day tuck up and tried fur a lunatic, and that I fur one was ready and willin' to testify to the crazy things I'd seen done with my own eyes—when he cut in on me and jest ez good ez told me to my own face that ef I'd quit tendin' to other people's business I'd mebbe have more business of my own to tend to.

"Think of that, gentlemen! A circuit judge bemeanin' a citizen and a taxpayer"—he checked himself slightly—"anyhow, a citizen, thataway! It shows he can't be rational his own self. Personally I claim Old Priest is failin' mentally—he must be! And ef anybody kin be found to run against him at the next election you gentlemen jest watch and see who gits my vote!"

Having uttered this threat with deep and significant emphasis Mr. Escott, still muttering, turned and entered the front gate of his boarding house. It was not exactly his boarding house; his wife ran it. But Mr. Escott lived there and voted from there.

But the apogee of Peep O'Day's carnival of weird vagaries of deportment came at the end of two months—two months in which

each day the man furnished cumulative and piled-up material for derisive and jocular comment on the part of a very considerable proportion of his fellow townsmen.

Three occurrences of a widely dissimilar nature, yet all closely interrelated to the main issue, marked the climax of the man's new rôle in his new career. The first of these was the arrival of his legacy; the second was a one-ring circus; and the third and last was a nephew.

In the form of certain bills of exchange the estate left by the late Daniel O'Day, of the town of Kilmare, in the island of Ireland, was on a certain afternoon delivered over into Judge Priest's hands, and by him, in turn, handed to the rightful owner, after which sundry indebtednesses, representing the total of the old Judge's day-to-day cash advances to O'Day, were liquidated.

The ceremony of deducting this sum took place at the Planters' Bank, whither the two had journeyed in company from the courthouse. Having, with the aid of the paying teller, instructed O'Day in the technical details requisite to the drawing of personal checks, Judge Priest went home and had his bag packed, and left for Reelfoot Lake to spend a week fishing. As a consequence he missed the remaining two events, following immediately thereafter.

The circus was no great shakes of a circus; no grand, glittering, gorgeous, glorious pageant

of education and entertainment, travelling on its own special trains; no vast tented city of world's wonders and world's champions, heralded for weeks and weeks in advance of its coming by dead walls emblazoned with the finest examples of the lithographer's art, and by half-page advertisements in the *Daily Evening News*. On the contrary, it was a shabby little wagon show, which, coming overland on short notice, rolled into town under horse power, and set up its ragged and dusty canvases on the vacant lot across from Yeiser's drug store.

Compared with the street parade of any of its great and famous rivals, the street parade of this circus was a meagre and disappointing thing. Why, there was only one elephant, a dwarfish and debilitated-looking creature, worn mangy and slick on its various angles, like the cover of an old-fashioned haircloth trunk; and obviously most of the closed cages were weather-beaten stake wagons in disguise. Nevertheless, there was a sizable turnout of people for the afternoon performance. After all, a circus was a circus.

Moreover, this particular circus was marked at the afternoon performance by happenings of a nature most decidedly unusual. At one o'clock the doors were opened: at one-ten the eyes of the proprietor were made glad and his heart was uplifted within him by the sight of a strange procession, drawing nearer and nearer

across the scuffed turf of the common, and heading in the direction of the red ticket wagon.

At the head of the procession marched Peep O'Day—only, of course, the proprietor didn't know it was Peep O'Day—a queer figure in his rumpled black clothes and his red-topped brass-toed boots, and with one hand holding fast to the string of a captive toy balloon. Behind him, in an uneven jostling formation, followed many small boys and some small girls. A census of the ranks would have developed that here were included practically all the juvenile white population who otherwise, through a lack of funds, would have been denied the opportunity to patronise this circus or, in fact, any circus.

Each member of the joyous company was likewise the bearer of a toy balloon—red, yellow, blue, green or purple, as the case might be. Over the line of heads the taut rubbery globes rode on their tethers, nodding and twisting like so many big iridescent bubbles; and half a block away, at the edge of the lot, a balloon vender, whose entire stock had been disposed of in one splendid transaction, now stood, empty-handed but full-pocketed, marvelling at the stroke of luck that enabled him to take an afternoon off and rest his voice.

Out of a seemingly bottomless exchequer Peep O'Day bought tickets of admission for all. But this was only the beginning. Once inside the tent he procured accommodations in the

reserved-seat section for himself and those who accompanied him. From such superior points of vantage the whole crew of them witnessed the performance, from the thrilling grand entry, with spangled ladies and gentlemen riding two by two on broad-backed steeds, to the tumbling bout introducing the full strength of the company, which came at the end.

They munched fresh-roasted peanuts and balls of sugar-coated pop corn, slightly rancid, until they munched no longer with zest but merely mechanically. They drank pink lemonade to an extent that threatened absolute depletion of the fluid contents of both barrels in the refreshment stand out in the menagerie tent. They whooped their unbridled approval when the wild Indian chief, after shooting down a stuffed coon with a bow and arrow from somewhere up near the top of the centre pole while balancing himself jauntily erect upon the haunches of a coursing white charger, suddenly flung off his feathered headdress, his wig and his fringed leather garments, and revealed himself in pink fleshings as the principal bareback rider.

They screamed in a chorus of delight when the funny old clown, who had been forcibly deprived of three tin flutes in rapid succession, now produced yet a fourth from the seemingly inexhaustible depths of his baggy white pants—a flute with a string and a bent pin affixed to it—and, secretly hooking the pin in the tail of

the cross ringmaster's coat, was thereafter enabled to toot sharp shrill blasts at frequent intervals, much to the chagrin of the ringmaster, who seemed utterly unable to discover the whereabouts of the instrument dangling behind him.

But no one among them whooped louder or laughed longer than their elderly and bewhiskered friend, who sat among them, paying the bills. As his guests they stayed for the concert; and, following this, they patronised the side show in a body. They had been almost the first upon the scene; assuredly they were the last of the audience to quit it.

Indeed, before they trailed their confrère away from the spot the sun was nearly down; and at scores of supper tables all over town the tale of poor old Peep O'Day's latest exhibition of freakishness was being retailed, with elaborations, to interested auditors. Estimates of the sum probably expended by him in this crowning extravagance ranged well up into the hundreds of dollars.

As for the object of these speculations, he was destined not to eat any supper at all that night. Something happened that so upset him as to make him forget the meal altogether. It began to happen when he reached the modest home of P. Gafford, adjoining the Gafford stables, on Locust Street, and found sitting on the lowermost step of the porch a young man of untidy and unshaven aspect, who

hailed him affectionately as Uncle Paul, and who showed deep annoyance and acute distress upon being rebuffed with chill words.

It is possible that the strain of serving a three-months' sentence, on the technical charge of vagrancy, in a workhouse somewhere in Indiana, had affected the young man's nerves. His ankle bones still ached where the ball and chain had been hitched; on his palms the blisters induced by the uncongenial use of a sledge hammer on a rock pile had hardly as yet turned to calluses. So it is only fair to presume that his nervous system felt the stress of his recent confining experiences.

Almost tearfully he pleaded with Peep O'Day to remember the ties of blood that bound them; repeatedly he pointed out that he was the only known kinsman of the other in all the world, and, therefore, had more reason than any other living being to expect kindness and generosity at his uncle's hands. He spoke socialistically of the advisability of an equal division; failing to make any impression here he mentioned the subject of a loan—at first hopefully, but finally despairingly.

When he was done Peep O'Day, in a perfectly colourless and unsympathetic voice, bade him good-by—not good night but good-by! And, going inside the house, he closed the door behind him, leaving his newly returned relative outside and quite alone.

At this the young man uttered violent lan-

guage; but, since there was nobody present to hear him, it is likely he found small satisfaction in his profanity, rich though it may have been in metaphor and variety. So presently he betook himself off, going straight to the office in Legal Row of H. B. Sublette, attorney at law.

From the circumstance that he found Mr. Sublette in, though it was long past that gentleman's office hours, and, moreover, found Mr. Sublette waiting in an expectant and attentive attitude, it might have been adduced by one skilled in the trick of putting two and two together that the pair of them had reached a prior understanding sometime during the day; and that the visit of the young man to the Gafford home and his speeches there had all been parts of a scheme planned out at a prior conference.

Be this as it may, as soon as Mr. Sublette had heard his caller's version of the meeting upon the porch he lost no time in taking certain legal steps. That very night, on behalf of his client, denominated in the documents as Percival Dwyer, Esquire, he prepared a petition addressed to the circuit judge of the district, setting forth that, inasmuch as Paul Felix O'Day had by divers acts shown himself to be of unsound mind, now, therefore, came his nephew and next of kin praying that a committee or curator be appointed to take over the estate of the said Paul Felix O'Day, and administer the same in accordance with the orders

of the court until such time as the said Paul Felix O'Day should recover his reason, or should pass from this life, and so forth and so on; not to mention whereases in great number and aforesaids abounding throughout the text in the utmost profusion.

On the following morning the papers were filed with Circuit Clerk Milam. That vigilant barrister, Mr. Sublette, brought them in person to the courthouse before nine o'clock, he having the interests of his client at heart and perhaps also visions of a large contingent fee in his mind. No retainer had been paid. The state of Mr. Dwyer's finances—or, rather, the absence of any finances—had precluded the performance of that customary detail; but to Mr. Sublette's experienced mind the prospects of future increment seemed large.

Accordingly he was all for prompt action. Formally he said he wished to go on record as demanding for his principal a speedy hearing of the issue, with a view to preventing the defendant named in the pleadings from dissipating any more of the estate lately bequeathed to him and now fully in his possession —or words to that effect.

Mr. Milam felt justified in getting into communication with Judge Priest over the long-distance phone; and the Judge, cutting short his vacation and leaving uncaught vast numbers of bass and perch in Reelfoot Lake, came home, arriving late that night.

Next morning, having issued divers orders in connection with the impending litigation, he sent a messenger to find Peep O'Day and to direct O'Day to come to the courthouse for a personal interview.

Shortly thereafter a scene that had occurred some two months earlier, with His Honour's private chamber for a setting, was substantially duplicated: There was the same cast of two, the same stage properties, the same atmosphere of untidy tidiness. And, as before, the dialogue was in Judge Priest's hands. He led and his fellow character followed his leads.

"Peep," he was saying, "you understand, don't you, that this here fragrant nephew of yours that's turned up from nowheres in particular is fixin' to git ready to try to prove that you are feeble-minded? And, on top of that, that he's goin' to ask that a committee be app'inted fur you—in other words, that somebody or other shall be named by the court, meanin' me, to take charge of your property and control the spendin' of it frum now on?"

"Yes, suh," stated O'Day. "Pete Gafford he set down with me and made hit all clear to me, yestiddy evenin', after they'd done served the papers on me."

"All right, then. Now I'm goin' to fix the hearin' fur to-morrow mornin' at ten. The other side is askin' fur a quick decision; and I rather figger they're entitled to it. Is that agreeable to you?"

"Whutever you say, Judge."

"Well, have you retained a lawyer to represent your interests in court? That's the main question that I sent fur you to ast you."

"Do I need a lawyer, Judge?"

"Well, there have been times when I regarded lawyers ez bein' superfluous," stated Judge Priest dryly. "Still, in most cases litigants do have 'em round when the case is bein' heard."

"I don't know ez I need any lawyer to he'p me say whut I've got to say," said O'Day. "Judge, you ain't never ast me no questions about the way I've been carryin' on sence I come into this here money; but I reckin mebbe this is ez good a time ez any to tell you jest why I've been actin' the way I've done. You see, suh——"

"Hold on!" broke in Judge Priest. "Up till now, ez my friend, it would 'a' been perfectly proper fur you to give me your confidences ef you were minded so to do; but now I reckin you'd better not. You see, I'm the judge that's got to decide whether you are a responsible person—whether you're mentally capable of handlin' your own financial affairs, or whether you ain't. So you'd better wait and make your statement in your own behalf to me whilst I'm settin' on the bench. I'll see that you git an opportunity to do so and I'll listen to it; and I'll give it all the consideration it's deservin' of.

"And, on second thought, p'raps it would

only be a waste of time and money fur you to go hirin' a lawyer specially to represent you. Under the law it's my duty, in sech a case ez this here one is, to app'int a member of the bar to serve durin' the proceedin's ez your guardian *ad litem.*

"You don't need to be startled," he added as O'Day flinched at the sound in his ears of these strange and fearsome words. "A guardian *ad litem* is simply a lawyer that tends to your affairs till the case is settled one way or the other. Ef you had a dozen lawyers I'd have to app'int him jest the same. So you don't need to worry about that part of it.

"That's all. You kin go now ef you want to. Only, ef I was you, I wouldn't draw out any more money frum the bank 'twixt now and the time when I make my decision."

All things considered, it was an unusual assemblage that Judge Priest regarded over the top rims of his glasses as he sat facing it in his broad armchair, with the flat top of the bench intervening between him and the gathering. Not often, even in the case of exciting murder trials, had the old courtroom held a larger crowd; certainly never had it held so many boys. Boys, and boys exclusively, filled the back rows of benches downstairs. More boys packed the narrow shelf-like balcony that spanned the chamber across its far end—mainly small boys, barefooted, sunburned,

freckled-faced, shock-headed boys. And, for boys, they were strangely silent and strangely attentive.

The petitioner sat with his counsel, Mr. Sublette. The petitioner had been newly shaved, and from some mysterious source had been equipped with a neat wardrobe. Plainly he was endeavouring to wear a look of virtue, which was a difficult undertaking, as you would understand had you known the petitioner.

The defending party to the action was seated across the room, touching elbows with old Colonel Farrell, dean of the local bar and its most florid orator.

"The court will designate Col. Horatio Farrell as guardian *ad litem* for the defendant during these proceedings," Judge Priest had stated a few minutes earlier, using the formal and grammatical language he reserved exclusively for his courtroom.

At once old Colonel Farrell had hitched his chair up alongside O'Day; had asked him several questions in a tone inaudible to those about them; had listened to the whispered answers of O'Day; and then had nodded his huge curly white dome of a head, as though amply satisfied with the responses.

Let us skip the preliminaries. True, they seemed to interest the audience; here, though, they would be tedious reading. Likewise, in touching upon the opening and outlining

address of Attorney-at-Law Sublette let us, for the sake of time and space, be very much briefer than Mr. Sublette was. For our present purposes, I deem it sufficient to say that in all his professional career Mr. Sublette was never more eloquent, never more forceful, never more vehement in his allegations, and never more convinced—as he himself stated, not once but repeatedly—of his ability to prove the facts he alleged by competent and unbiased testimony. These facts, he pointed out, were common knowledge in the community; nevertheless, he stood prepared to buttress them with the evidence of reputable witnesses, given under oath.

Mr. Sublette, having unwound at length, now wound up. He sat down, perspiring freely and through the perspiration radiating confidence in his contentions, confidence in the result and, most of all, unbounded confidence in Mr. Sublette.

Now Colonel Farrell was standing up to address the court. Under the cloak of a theatrical presence and a large orotund manner, and behind a Ciceronian command of sonorous language, the colonel carried concealed a shrewd old brain. It was as though a skilled marksman lurked in ambush amid a tangle of luxuriant foliage. In this particular instance, moreover, it is barely possible that the colonel was acting on a cue, privily conveyed to him before the court opened.

"May it please Your Honour," he began,

"I have just conferred with the defendant here; and, acting in the capacity of his guardian *ad litem*, I have advised him to waive an opening address by counsel. Indeed, the defendant has no counsel. Furthermore, the defendant, also acting upon my advice, will present no witnesses in his own behalf. But, with Your Honour's permission, the defendant will now make a personal statement; and thereafter he will rest content, leaving the final arbitrament of the issue to Your Honour's discretion."

"I object!" exclaimed Mr. Sublette briskly.

"On what grounds does the learned counsel object?" inquired Judge Priest.

"On the grounds that, since the mental competence of this man is concerned—since it is our contention that he is patently and plainly a victim of senility, an individual prematurely in his dotage—any utterances by him will be of no value whatsoever in aiding the conscience and intelligence of the court to arrive at a fair and just conclusion regarding the defendant's mental condition."

Mr. Sublette excelled in the use of big words; there was no doubt about that.

"The objection is overruled," said Judge Priest. He nodded in the direction of O'Day and Colonel Farrell. "The court will hear the defendant. He is not to be interrupted while making his statement. The defendant may proceed."

Without further urging, O'Day stood up,

a tall, slab-sided rack of a man, with his long arms dangling at his sides, half facing Judge Priest and half facing his nephew and his nephew's lawyer. Without hesitation he began to speak. And this was what he said:

"There's mebbe some here ez knows about how I was raised and fetched up. My paw and my maw died when I was jest only a baby; so I was brung up out here at the old county porehouse ez a pauper. I can't remember the time when I didn't have to work for my board and keep, and work hard. While other boys was goin' to school and playin' hooky, and goin' in washin' in the creek, and playin' games, and all sech ez that, I had to work. I never done no playin' round in my whole life—not till here jest recently, anyway.

"But I always craved to play round some. I didn't never say nothin' about it to nobody after I growed up, 'cause I figgered it out they wouldn't understand and mebbe'd laugh at me; but all these years, ever sence I left that there porehouse, I've had a hankerin' here inside of me"—he lifted one hand and touched his breast—"I've had a hankerin' to be a boy and to do all the things a boy does; to do the things I was chiselled out of doin' whilst I was of a suitable age to be doin' 'em. I call to mind that I uster dream in my sleep about doin' 'em; but the dream never come true—not till jest here lately. It didn't have no chancet to come true—not till then.

"So, when this money come to me so sudden and unbeknownstlike I said to myself that I was goin' to make that there dream come true; and I started out fur to do it. And I done it! And I reckin that's the cause of my bein' here to-day, accused of bein' feeble-minded. But, even so, I don't regret it none. Ef it was all to do over ag'in I'd do it jest the very same way.

"Why, I never knowed whut it was, till here two months or so ago, to have my fill of bananas and candy and gingersnaps, and all sech knickknacks ez them. All my life I've been cravin' secretly to own a pair of red-topped boots with brass toes on 'em, like I used to see other boys wearin' in the wintertime when I was out yonder at that porehouse wearin' an old pair of somebody else's cast-off shoes—mebbe a man's shoes, with rags wropped round my feet to keep the snow frum comin' through the cracks in 'em, and to keep 'em frum slippin' right spang off my feet. I got three toes frostbit oncet durin' a cold spell, wearin' them kind of shoes. But here the other week I found myself able to buy me some red-top boots with brass toes on 'em. So I had 'em made to order and I'm wearin' 'em now. I wear 'em reg'lar even ef it is summertime. I take a heap of pleasure out of 'em. And, also, all my life long I've been wantin' to go to a circus. But not till three days ago I didn't never git no chancet to go to one.

"That gentleman yonder—Mister Sublette—

he 'lowed jest now that I was leadin' a lot of little boys in this here town into bad habits. He said that I was learnin' 'em nobody knowed whut devilment. And he spoke of my havin' egged 'em on to steal watermelons frum Mister Bell's watermelon patch out here three miles frum town, on the Marshallville gravel road. You-all heared whut he jest now said about that.

"I don't mean no offence and I beg his pardon fur contradictin' him right out before everybody here in the big courthouse; but, mister, you're wrong. I don't lead these here boys astray that I've been runnin' round with. They're mighty nice clean boys, all of 'em. Some of 'em are mighty near ez pore ez whut I uster be; but there ain't no real harm in any of 'em. We git along together fine—me and them. And, without no preachin', nor nothin' like that, I've done my best these weeks we've been frolickin' and projectin' round together to keep 'em frum growin' up to do mean things.

"I use chawin' tobacco myself; but I've tole 'em, I don't know how many times, that ef they chaw it'll stunt 'em in their growth. And I've got several of 'em that was smokin' cigarettes on the sly to promise me they'd quit. So I don't figger ez I've done them boys any real harm by goin' round with 'em. And I believe ef you was to ast 'em they'd all tell you the same, suh.

"Now about them watermelons: Sence this

gentleman has brung them watermelons up, I'm goin' to tell you-all the truth about that too."

He cast a quick, furtive look, almost a guilty look, over his shoulder toward the rear of the courtroom before he went on:

"Them watermelons wasn't really stole at all. I seen Mister Dick Bell beforehand and arranged with him to pay him in full fur whutever damage mout be done. But, you see, I knowed watermelons tasted sweeter to a boy ef he thought he'd hooked 'em out of a patch; so I never let on to my little pardners yonder that I'd the same ez paid Mister Bell in advance fur the melons we took out of his patch and et in the woods. They've all been thinkin' up till now that we really hooked them watermelons. But ef that was wrong I'm sorry fur it.

"Mister Sublette, you jest now said that I was fritterin' away my property on vain foolishment. Them was the words you used—'fritterin'' and 'vain foolishment.' Mebbe you're right, suh, about the fritterin' part; but ef spendin' money in a certain way gives a man ez much pleasure ez it's give me these last two months, and ef the money is his'n by rights, I figger it can't be so very foolish; though it may 'pear so to some.

"Excusin' these here clothes I've got on and these here boots, which ain't paid fur yet, but are charged up to me on Felsburg Brothers'

books and Mister M. Biederman's books, I didn't spend only a dollar a day, or mebbe two dollars, and once three dollars in a single day out of whut was comin' to me. The Judge here, he let me have that out of his own pocket; and I paid him back. And that was all I did spend till here three days ago when that there circus come to town. I reckin I did spend a right smart then.

"My money had come frum the old country only the day before; so I went to the bank and they writ out one of them pieces of paper which is called a check, and I signed it—with my mark; and they give me the money I wanted—an even two hundred dollars. And part of that there money I used to pay fur circus tickets fur all the little boys and little girls I could find in this town that couldn't 'a' got to the circus no other way. Some of 'em are settin' back there behind you-all now—some of the boys, I mean; I don't see none of the little girls.

"There was several of 'em told me at the time they hadn't never seen a circus—not in their whole lives! Fur that matter, I hadn't, neither; but I didn't want no pore child in this town to grow up to be ez old ez I am without havin' been to at least one circus. So I taken 'em all in and paid all the bills; and when night come there wasn't but 'bout nine dollars left out of the whole two hundred that I'd started out with in the mornin'. But I don't begredge spendin' it. It looks to me like it was money

well invested. They all seemed to enjoy it; and I know I done so.

"There may be bigger circuses'n whut that one was; but I don't see how a circus could 'a' been any better than this here one I'm tellin' about, ef it was ten times ez big. I don't regret the investment and I don't aim to lie about it now. Mister Sublette, I'd do the same thing over ag'in ef the chance should come, lawsuit or no lawsuit. Ef you should win this here case mebbe I wouldn't have no second chance.

"Ef some gentleman is app'inted ez a committee to handle my money it's likely he wouldn't look at the thing the same way I do; and it's likely he wouldn't let me have so much money all in one lump to spend takin' a passel of little shavers that ain't no kin to me to the circus and to the side show, besides lettin' 'em stay fur the grand concert or after-show, and all. But I done it once; and I've got it to remember about and think about in my own mind ez long ez I live.

"I'm 'bout finished now. There's jest one thing more I'd like to say, and that is this: Mister Sublette he said a minute ago that I was in my second childhood. Meanin' no offence, suh, but you was wrong there too. The way I look at it, a man can't be in his second childhood without he's had his first childhood; and I was cheated plum' out of mine. I'm more'n sixty years old, ez near ez

I kin figger; but I'm tryin' to be a boy before it's too late."

He paused a moment and looked round him.

"The way I look at it, Judge Priest, suh, and you-all, every man that grows up, no matter how old he may git to be, is entitled to 'a' been a boy oncet in his lifetime. I—I reckin that's all."

He sat down and dropped his eyes upon the floor, as though ashamed that his temerity should have carried him so far. There was a strange little hush filling the courtroom. It was Judge Priest who broke it.

"The court," he said, "has by the words just spoken by this man been sufficiently advised as to the sanity of the man himself. The court cares to hear nothing more from either side on this subject. The petition is dismissed."

Very probably these last words may have been as so much Greek to the juvenile members of the audience; possibly, though, they were made aware of the meaning of them by the look upon the face of Nephew Percival Dwyer and the look upon the face of Nephew Percival Dwyer's attorney. At any rate, His Honour hardly had uttered the last syllable of his decision before, from the rear of the courtroom and from the gallery above, there arose a shrill, vehement, sincere sound of yelling—exultant, triumphant and deafening. It continued for upward of a minute before the small

disturbers remembered where they were and reduced themselves to a state of comparative quiet.

For reasons best known to himself, Judge Priest, who ordinarily stickled for order and decorum in his courtroom, made no effort to quell the outburst or to have it quelled—not even when a considerable number of the adults present joined in it, having first cleared their throats of a slight huskiness that had come upon them, severally and generally.

Presently the Judge rapped for quiet—and got it. It was apparent that he had more to say; and all there hearkened to hear what it might be.

"I have just this to add," quoth His Honour: "It is the official judgment of this court that the late defendant, being entirely sane, is competent to manage his own affairs after his preferences.

"And it is the private opinion of this court that not only is the late defendant sane but that he is the sanest man in this entire jurisdiction. Mister Clerk, court stands adjourned."

Coming down the three short steps from the raised platform of the bench, Judge Priest beckoned to Sheriff Giles Birdsong, who, at the tail of the departing crowd, was shepherding its last exuberant members through the doorway.

"Giles," said Judge Priest in an undertone,

when the worthy sheriff had drawn near, "the circuit clerk tells me there's an indictment fur malicious mischief ag'in this here Perce Dwyer knockin' round amongst the records somewheres—an indictment the grand jury returned several sessions back, but which was never pressed, owin' to the sudden departure frum our midst of the person in question.

"I wonder ef it would be too much trouble fur you to sort of drap a hint in the ear of the young man or his lawyer that the said indictment is apt to be revived, and that the said Dwyer is liable to be tuck into custody by you and lodged in the county jail sometime during the ensuin' forty-eight hours—without he should see his way clear durin' the meantime to get clean out of this city, county and state! Would it?"

"Trouble? No, suh! It won't be no trouble to me," said Mr. Birdsong promptly. "Why, it'll be more of a pleasure, Judge."

And so it was.

Except for one small added and purely incidental circumstance, our narrative is ended. That same afternoon Judge Priest sat on the front porch of his old white house out on Clay Street, waiting for Jeff Poindexter to summon him to supper. Peep O'Day opened the front gate and came up the gravelled walk between the twin rows of silver-leaf poplars. The Judge, rising to greet his visitor, met him at the top step.

"Come in," bade the Judge heartily, "and set down a spell and rest your face and hands."

"No, suh; much obliged, but I ain't got only a minute to stay," said O'Day. "I jest come out here, suh, to thank you fur whut you done to-day on my account in the big courthouse, and—and to make you a little kind of a present."

"It's all right to thank me," said Judge Priest; "but I couldn't accept any reward fur renderin' a decision in accordance with the plain facts."

"'Tain't no gift of money, or nothin' like that," O'Day hastened to explain. "Really, suh, it don't amount to nothin' at all, scursely. But a little while ago I happened to be in Mr. B. Weil & Son's store, doin' a little tradin', and I run acrost a new kind of knickknack, which it seemed like to me it was about the best thing I ever tasted in my whole life. So, on the chancet, suh, that you might have a sweet tooth, too, I taken the liberty of bringin' you a sack of 'em and—and—and here they are, suh; three flavors—strawberry, lemon and vanilly."

Suddenly overcome with confusion, he dislodged a large-sized paper bag from his side coat pocket and thrust it into Judge Priest's hands; then, backing away, he turned and clumped down the graveled path in great and embarrassed haste.

Judge Priest opened the bag and peered down into it. It contained a sticky, sugary

dozen of flattened confections, each moulded round a short length of wooden splinter. These sirupy articles, which have since come into quite general use, are known, I believe, as all-day suckers.

When Judge Priest looked up again, Peep O'Day was outside the gate, clumping down the uneven sidewalk of Clay Street with long strides of his booted legs. Half a dozen small boys, who, it was evident, had remained hidden during the ceremony of presentation, now mysteriously appeared and were accompanying the departing donor, half trotting to keep up with him.

CHAPTER IV

THE LUCK PIECE

UNTIL now Trencher—to give him the name by which of all the names he used he best was known—had kept his temper in hobbles, no matter what or how great the provocation. As one whose mode of livelihood was trick and device outside the law it had behooved him ever to restrain himself from violent outbreaks, to school and curb and tame his natural tendencies as a horsebreaker might gentle a spirited colt. A man who held his disposition always under control could think faster than any man who permitted his passions to jangle his nerves. Besides, he had the class contempt of the high-grade confidence man—the same being the aristocrat of the underworld—for the crude and violent and therefore doubly dangerous codes of the stick-up, who is a highwayman; and the prowler, who is a burglar; and the yegg, who is a safe blower of sorts.

Until now Trencher had held fast by the self-imposed rules of his self-imposed discipline,

and so doing had lived well and lived safe. It was an unfortunate thing all round that this little rat of a Sonntag had crossed him at an hour when he was profoundly irritated by the collapse of their elaborately planned and expensive scheme to divest that Cheyenne cattleman of his bank roll at the wire game. And it was a doubly unfortunate thing for Sonntag seeing that Sonntag had just been shot three times with his own automatic and was now dead or should be.

It was like Sonntag—and most utterly unlike Trencher—to whine over spilt milk and seek to shift the blame for the failure of their plot to any pair of shoulders rather than his own thin pair. And to the very life it was like Sonntag that at the climax of the quarrel he should have made a gun play. As Trencher now realised, it had been his mistake in the first place that he took Sonntag on for a partner in the thwarted operation; but it had been Sonntag's great, fatal mistake that he had drawn a weapon against a man who could think faster and act faster in emergencies than Sonntag ever had been able to do. Having drawn it Sonntag should have used it. But having drawn it he had hesitated for a space not to be measured in computable time—and that delay had been his undoing.

The gun-pulling episode had taken place in Thirty-ninth Street, between Sixth Avenue and Broadway, but nearer Broadway than

Sixth Avenue, at a moment when that block of Thirty-ninth Street was as near empty as ever it gets to be. The meeting in the darkened place, just where the portico at the side entrance of the old Jollity Theatre, extending out across the sidewalk, made a patch of obscurity in the half-lit street, had been a meeting by chance so far as Trencher was concerned. He had not been looking for Sonntag; hadn't wanted to see Sonntag. Whether Sonntag had been seeking him was something which nobody probably would ever know this side the hereafter.

To the best of Trencher's belief there had been but one possible eyewitness to the actual shooting. Out of the tail of his eye, just before he and Sonntag came to grips, he had caught a glimpse of this surmisable third party. He had sensed rather than seen that an elderly bearded man, perhaps the watchman of the closed theatre, passed along the sidewalk, going east. It was Trencher's impression that the man had gone on by without halting. However, on that point he could not be sure. What the onlooker had seen—if indeed there were an onlooker—could have been only this: Two men, one fairly tall and dressed in a sprightly fashion, one short and dark, engaged in a vehement but whispered quarrel there in the cloaking shadow close up to the locked double doors of the Jollity; a sudden hostile move on the part of the slighter man, backing away and reaching for his flank; a

quick forward jump by the taller man to close with the other; a short sharp struggle as the pair of them fought for possession of the revolver which the dark man had jerked from his flank pocket; then the tall man, victorious, shoving his antagonist clear of him and stepping back a pace; and on top of this the three sharp reports and the three little spurts of fire bridging the short gap between the sundered enemies like darting red hyphens to punctuate the enacted tragedy.

Now the tall man, the one conspicuously dressed, had been Trencher. The shooting accomplished he stood where he was only long enough to see Sonntag fold up and sink down in a slumped shape in the doorway. He had seen men, mortally stricken, who folded up in that very same way; therefore he appraised Sonntag as one already dead, or at least as one who would die very speedily.

As he stepped out across the sidewalk into the roadway he let the automatic fall alongside the curb. The instant he had done this the heat of his hate departed from him leaving him cool and clear-minded and alert. It was as though the hot fumes of rage had all evaporated from his brain in the same twentieth part of a second that he had spent in discarding the weapon. For the reason that he was again entirely himself, resourceful and steady, he did not fall into the error of running away. To run away in this instant was to invite pursuit.

Instead he walked to the middle of the street, halted and looked about him—the picture of a citizen who had been startled by the sound of shots. This artifice, he felt sure, served to disarm possible suspicion on the part of any one of the persons who came hurrying up from east and west and from the north, across the street. Two or three of these first arrivals almost brushed him as they lunged past, drawing in toward the spot where Sonntag's doubled-up body made a darker blot in the darkened parallelogram beneath the portico.

Trencher had been in close places before now—close places when something smacking of violence had occurred—and he knew or felt he knew what next would happen to give him the precious grace of seconds and perhaps of minutes. Those who came foremost upon the scene would, through caution, hesitate for a brief space of time before venturing close up to where the hunched shape lay. Then having circled and drawn in about the victim of the shooting they would for another brief period huddle together, asking excited and pointless questions of one another, some of them perhaps bending down and touching the victim to see whether he lived, some of them looking round for a policeman, some of them doing nothing at all—except confusedly to get in the way of everybody else. This would be true of ninety-nine average individuals out of an average hundred of city population. But the hun-

dredth man would keep his wits about him, seeking for the cause of the thing rather than concerning himself with the accomplished effect. For the moment it was this hundredth man Trencher would have to fear. Nevertheless, it would never do for him to show undue haste. Bearing himself in the matter of a disinterested citizen who had business that was not to be interfered with by street brawls, he turned away from the south, toward which he had been looking, shrugged his shoulders, and moving briskly, but without any seeming great haste, he made for the revolving door at the Thirty-ninth Street entrance to Wallinger's Hotel, diagonally across from the Jollity. With one hand on a panel of the door he stopped again and looked back.

Already, so soon, a crowd was gathering over the way—a little crowd—which at once inevitably would become a dense jostling crowd. A policeman, not to be mistaken even at a distance of seventy feet or more for anyone but a policeman, had turned the corner out of Broadway and was running down the opposite pavement. The policeman's arrival was to be expected; it would be his business to arrive at the earliest possible moment, and having arrived to lead the man hunt that would follow. What Trencher, peering over his shoulder, sought for, was the hundredth man —the man who, ignoring the lesser fact of a dead body, would strive first off to catch

up the trail of whosoever had done this thing.

Trencher thought he made him out. There was to be seen an elderly man, roughly dressed, possibly the same man whose proximity Trencher had felt rather than observed just before Sonntag made the gun play, and this man was half-squatted out on the asphalt with his back to where the rest circled and swirled about the body. Moreover, this person was staring directly in Trencher's direction. As Trencher passed within the revolving door he saw the man pivot on his heels and start at an angle toward the policeman just as the policeman was swallowed up in the rings of figures converging into the theatre doorway.

If the policeman were of a common-enough type of policeman—that is to say, if he were the sort of policeman who would waste time examining Sonntag's body for signs of life and then waste more time asking questions of those who had preceded him to the place, and yet more time peering about for the weapon that had been used; or if, in the excitement with everybody shouting together, the one man who possibly had a real notion concerning the proper description of the vanished slayer found difficulty in securing the policeman's attention—why then, in any one of these cases, or better still, in all of them, Trencher had a chance. With a definite and intelligently guided pursuit starting forthwith he would be

lost. But with three minutes, or two even, of delay vouchsafed him before the alarm took shape and purpose he might make it.

Accepting the latter contingency as the assured one he formed a plan instantaneously. Indeed, it sprang full-formed into his mind as the door swung round behind him. It added to the immediate difficulties of his present situation that he was most notably marked—by his garb. He had the dramatic sense well developed, as any man must have who succeeds at his calling. When Trencher played a part he dressed the part. In the staging of the plot for the undoing of the Cheyenne cattleman his had been the rôle of the sporting ex-telegraph operator, who could get "flashes" on the result of horse races before the names of the winners came over an imaginary tapped wire to the make-believe pool room where the gull was stripped; and he had been at some pains and expense to procure a wardrobe befitting the character.

The worst of it was that he now wore the make-up—the short fawn-coloured overcoat with its big showy buttons of smoked pearl, the brown derby hat with its striking black band, and the pair of light-tan spats. Stripped of these things he would be merely a person in a costume in nowise to be distinguished from the costumes of any number of other men in the Broadway district. But for the moment there was neither opportunity nor time to get rid

of all of them without attracting the attention that would be fatal to his prospects. Men who have nothing to hide do not remove spats in a hotel lobby, nor do they go about public places bareheaded in the nighttime. Now he could do but one thing to alter his appearance.

Midway of the cross hall which he had entered and which opened into the main lobby he slowed his gait long enough to undo the overcoat and slip out of it. The top button caught fast in its buttonhole, the coat being new and its buttonholes being stiff. He gave a sharp tug at the rebellious cloth, and the button, which probably had been insecurely sewed on in the first place, came away from its thread fastenings and lodged in the fingers of his right hand. Mechanically he dropped it into a side pocket of the overcoat and a moment later, with the garment turned inside out so that only its silk lining showed, and held under his arm, he had come out of the sideway and was in the lobby proper.

He was prepared mentally to find signs of an alarm here—to encounter persons hurrying toward the Thirty-ninth Street side of the building. But nothing of the sort was afoot. A darky orchestra was playing a jazz tune very loudly in the café at the left of the Broadway entrance, so it was not only possible but very likely that the sounds of the shots had not been heard inside the hotel at all. Certainly his eye, sweeping the place, discovered no evi-

dences of any unusual stir. Perhaps half a dozen individuals were traversing the tiled floor, but none of them in any seeming hurry.

With no suggestion of agitation about him anywhere and with nothing furtive or stealthy in his movements, Trencher boldly passed the corner of the desk, crossed the lobby, went along the front of the news stand, where a young woman stood among her wares, and through another set of revolving doors came out upon Broadway. It was that one hour of the night—a quarter of eleven o'clock, while the last acts are still going on and before the theatres give up their audiences—when Broadway's sidewalks are not absolutely overflowing with jostling, pouring currents of people. Numbers were abroad, for numbers always are abroad in this part of the town, be the time of day or of night what it may, but there was no congestion. This was as it should be; it suited this man's purposes exactly.

He issued forth, and a few rods north of the corner saw the person for whom he was seeking; at least he saw a most likely candidate—a ragged darky, in a district where ragged darkies unless they be beggars are not often seen, who with his hands in his pockets and his coat collar turned up was staring into the window of a small clothing shop two doors above the narrow-fronted hotel. Trencher made for him. Remember, all this—from the moment of the shooting until now—had taken much less time

than has been required for me to describe it in sequence or for you to read about it.

He tapped the darky on the arm.

"Boy," he said sharply, "want to pick up some easy money quick?"

"Yas, suh, I does!" The negro's eyes shone.

"Listen then: I've got to catch a train—sooner than I expected. My bag's packed and waiting for me up here at my boarding house in West Forty-fifth Street—Number 374 is the address—just west of Broadway—tall brownstone house with a high stoop. Get me? The bag's downstairs in the hall. The hall boy—a coloured fellow named Fred—is watching it for me. If I go in a cab I may not get to the station in time. If you go after it for me at a run I may catch my train. See? Here's a dollar down in advance. Tell Fred Mr. Thompson sent you—that's me, Thompson. He'll give it to you—I told him I'd send for it. I'll be waiting right here. If you get back with it in seven minutes I'll give you another dollar—and if you get back inside of seven minutes I'll make it two dollars more. Got the number in your mind?"

"Yas, suh—three seventy-fo' Wes' Forty-fift', you said."

"Correct. Now run like the very devil up Broadway to Forty-fifth and turn west!"

"Boss," cried the darky, "Ise gone!"

He was, too. His splay feet in their broken shoes fairly spurned the sidewalk as he darted northward, boring his way through the lanes of

pedestrians, knocking people aside out of their stride and followed as he went by a wake of curses and grunts and curious glances. On a street where nearly everyone trots but few gallop, the sight of a running man catches the popular interest instantly, the common theory being that the runner has done something wrong and is trying to get away, else he would not run.

The instant the negro turned his back on him, Trencher slid inside the recessed entrance of the clothing store and flattened himself against its door. If chance had timed the occurrence just right he would win the reprieve that he required for what he meant next to undertake. And sure enough, as it turned out, chance had so timed it.

For just as he pressed his bulk into the recess the man hunt manifested itself. Bursting headlong out of the front of Wallinger's Hotel came a policeman—doubtlessly the one already seen by Trencher—and just behind the policeman a roughly dressed bearded man, and with these two, at their heels, a jostling impetuous swarm of other men, to be joined instantly by yet more men, who had run round the corner of the hotel from Thirty-ninth Street, instead of passing through its lobby. For the veriest fraction of time they all slowed down, casting about them with their eyes for a trail to follow.

Trencher, looking slantwise to the south, could see them plainly. The foremost members

of the hesitating and uncertain group were not sixty feet from him. He forgot to breathe.

Then, all together, half a dozen pointing arms were flung out to the north.

"There he goes, officer, runnin'! See 'im yonder? See 'im?"

With a forward surge and a great clatter of feet the hunt was renewed. Past Trencher's refuge, with never a look this way or that, the policeman, the bearded man, all the rest of them, went pelting along the sidewalk, giving tongue like beagles. He could have put forth his hand and touched some of them as they sped by him. Numbers of foot travellers joined in the tail of the chase. Those who did not join it faced about to watch. Knowing that for a bit he would practically be free of the danger of close scrutiny, Trencher stepped out upon the sidewalk and looking north caught a glimpse of a bent fleeing figure scuttling up Broadway a block and a half beyond.

By this trick he had broken the trail and sent the pack off on a wrong scent. So far so good. He figured the outlook after this fashion: Set upon earning the double fee promised him the deluded darky, as he could tell, was still going at top speed, unconscious of any pursuit. If he continued to maintain his gait, if none tripped him, the probabilities were he would be round the corner in Forty-fifth Street, trying to find a mythical boarding house and a mythical hall boy named Fred, before the foremost

of the runners behind overtook and seized him. Then would follow shouts, yells, a babble of accusations, denials of all wrongful intent by the frightened captive and explanations by him to the policeman of his reason for running so hard.

Following on this the chase would double back on its tracks, and at once policemen in numbers, along with volunteers, would be combing the district for the real fugitive. Still, barring the unforeseen, a few minutes must intervene before this neighbourhood search would be getting under way; and meanwhile the real fugitive, calmly enough, was moving along in the rear of the rearmost of those who ran without knowing why they ran. He did not go far though—he dared not go far. Any second the darky might be tackled and thrown by someone on ahead, and besides there might be individuals close at hand who had not joined in the hue and cry, but who in some way had learned that the man so badly wanted wore such-and-such distinguishing garments.

It was because of this latter contingency that Trencher had not tried to slip back into Thirty-ninth Street. That had been his first impulse, but he discarded the thought as it came to him. His mind peopled the vicinity immediately south and east of him with potential enemies. To the north alone, in the wake of the chase, could he count upon a hope of transient security, and that would last only for so long as the negro

kept going. He could not get away from the spot—yet. And still it would be the height of recklessness for him, dressed as he was, to linger there. Temporarily he must bide where he was, and in this swarming, bright-as-day place he must find a hiding place from which he could see without being seen, spy without being spied upon or suspected for what he was. Even as he calculated these obstacles he figured a possible way out of the double-ended dilemma, or at any rate he figured his next step toward safety from detection for the moment, and, with continued luck, toward ultimate escape from a perilous spot where now no measure of immunity could be either long-lived or dependable.

I have said he did not go far to reach sanctuary. To be exact he did not go the length of the block between Thirty-ninth and Fortieth. He went only as far as the Clarenden, newest and smartest, and, for the time being, most popular of typical Broadway cafés, standing three buildings north of the clothing shop, or a total distance from it, let us say, of ninety feet. It was while he traversed those ninety feet that Trencher summed up the contingencies that hedged him in and reached his conclusion.

In front of the Clarenden against the curbing stood a short line of waiting motor vehicles. With one exception they were taxicabs. At the lower end of the queue, though, was a vast gaudy limousine, a bright blue in body colour,

with heavy trimmings of brass—and it was empty. The chauffeur, muffled in furs, sat in his place under the overhang of the peaked roof, with the glass slide at his right hand lowered and his head poked out as he peered up Broadway; but the car itself, Trencher saw, contained no occupant.

Trencher, drawing up alongside the limousine, was searching vainly for a monogram, a crest or a name on its varnished flank while he spoke.

"Driver," he said sharply, "whose car is this?"

"Mr. O'Gavin's," the chauffeur answered without turning to look at the person asking the question.

Trencher played a blind lead and yet not such a very blind lead either. Big as New York was there was likely to be but one O'Gavin in it who would have a car such as this one anchored in front of the Clarenden—and that would be the noted bookmaker. Trencher played his card.

"Jerome O'Gavin's, eh?" he inquired casually as though stating a foregone conclusion.

"Yes, sir; it's his car." And now the driver twisted his body and half-faced Trencher. "Say, boss, what's all the row about yonder?"

"Crowd chasing a pickpocket, I imagine," said Trencher indifferently. Then putting a touch of impatience in his voice: "Where is O'Gavin—inside?"

"Yes, sir! Said he'd be ready to go uptown at eleven. Must be near that now."

"Pretty near it. I was to meet him here at eleven myself and I thought I recognised his car."

"You'll find him in the grill, I guess, sir," said the driver, putting into the remark the tone of deference due to someone who was a friend of his employer's. "I understood him to say he had an appointment with some gentleman there. Was it you?"

"No, but I know who the gentleman is," said Trencher. "The other man's not such a very good friend of mine—that's why I'd rather wait outside for Jerome than to go in there." He made a feint at looking at his watch. "Hum, ten minutes more. Tell you what I think I'll do, driver: I think I'll just hop inside the car until O'Gavin comes out—better than loafing on the sidewalk, eh?"

"Just as you say. Make yourself comfortable, sir. Shall I switch on the lights?"

"No, never mind the lights, thank you." Trencher was already taking shelter within the limousine, making himself small on the wide back seat and hauling a thick rug up over his lap. Under the rug one knee was bent upward and the fingers of one hand were swiftly undoing the buttons of one fawn-coloured spat. If the chauffeur had chanced to glance back he would have seen nothing unusual going on. The chauffeur, though, never glanced back. He was staring dead ahead again.

"Say, boss, they've caught the pickpocket—if that's what he was," he cried out excitedly. "They're bringing him back."

"Glad they nailed him," answered Trencher through the glass that was between them. He had one spat off and was now unfastening its mate.

"It looks like a nigger," added the chauffeur, supplying a fresh bulletin as the captive was dragged nearer. "It is a nigger! Had his nerve with him, trying to pull off a trick in this part of town."

Through the right-hand side window Trencher peered out as the mass moved by—in front a panting policeman with his one hand gripped fast in the collar of Trencher's late messenger, and all about the pair and behind them a jostling, curious crowd of men and women.

"De gen'l'man dat sent me fur his bag is right down yere, I keeps tellin' you," Trencher heard the scared darky babbling as he was yanked past Trencher's refuge.

"All right then, show him to me, that's all," the officer was saying impatiently.

The chauffeur twisted about in his place, following the spectacle with his eyes. But Trencher had quit looking that way and was looking another way. The centre of excitement had been moved again—instead of being north of him it was now approximately ninety feet south, and he, thanks to the shift, was once

more behind it. Peering through the glass he watched the entrance to the Clarenden.

There he saw what he wanted to see—a tall man in a wide-brimmed soft dark hat and a long dark topcoat going up the short flight of steps that led from the pavement into the building. Trencher wadded the spats together and rammed them down out of sight between the back cushion and the under cushion of the car seat, and with his overcoat inside out on his left arm he opened the door and stepped out of the car. This retreat had served his purpose admirably; it was time to abandon it.

"Changed my mind," he said in explanation. "If O'Gavin doesn't hurry up we'll be late for an engagement we've got uptown. I'm going in after him."

"Yes; all right, sir," assented the chauffeur with his attention very much elsewhere.

In long steps Trencher crossed the sidewalk and ran up the steps so briskly that he passed through the door at the top of the short flight directly behind and almost touching the tall man in the dark hat and black coat. His heart beat fast; he was risking everything practically on the possibilities of what this other man meant to do.

The other man did exactly what Trencher was hoping he would do. He turned left and made for the Clarenden's famous Chinese lounging room, which in turn opened into the main restaurant. Trencher slipped nimbly by

his quarry and so beat him to where two young women in glorified uniforms of serving maids were stationed to receive wraps outside the checking booth; a third girl was inside the booth, her job being to take over checked articles from her sister helpers.

It befell therefore that Trencher surrendered his brown derby and his short tan coat, received a pasteboard check in exchange for them and saw them passed in over a flat shelf to be put on a hook, before the other man had been similarly served. When the other, now revealed as wearing a dinner jacket, came through the Orientalised passageway into the lounge, Trencher was quite ready for him. In his life Trencher had never picked a pocket, but as one thoroughly versed in the professionalism of the crime world, in which he was a distinguished figure, he knew how the trick, which is the highest phase of the art of the pickpocket, is achieved.

The thing was most neatly and most naturally accomplished. As the man in the dinner coat came just opposite him Trencher, swinging inward as though to avoid collision with the end of an upholstered couch, bumped into him, breast to breast.

"I beg your pardon," he said in contrite tones for his seeming awkwardness, and as he said it two darting fingers and the thumb of his right hand found and invaded the little slit of the stranger's waistcoat pocket, whisking out

the check which the stranger had but a moment before, with Trencher watching, deposited there.

"Granted—no harm done," said the man who had been jostled, and passed on leaving Trencher still uttering apologetic sounds. Palming the precious pasteboard, which meant so much to him, Trencher stood where he was until he saw the unsuspecting victim pass on through into the café and join two other men, who got up from a table in the far corner near one of the front windows to greet him.

Trencher followed leisurely to where a captain of waiters stood guard at the opening in the dividing partition between the lounge and the restaurant. Before him at his approach this functionary bowed.

"Alone, sir?" he inquired obsequiously.

"Yes and no," replied Trencher; "I'm alone now but I'll be back in half an hour with three others. I want to engage a table for four—not too close to the orchestra." He slipped a dollar bill into the captain's hand.

"Very good, sir. What name, sir?"

"Tracy is the name," said Trencher.

"Quite so, sir."

The captain turned to serve a party of men and women, and Trencher fell back. He idled back through the Chinese room, vigilant to note whether any of the persons scattered about it were regarding him with more than a casual interest or, more important still, whether any there present knew him personally.

Reassured on this point he stepped out of the room and along with a quarter for a tip tendered to one of the maids the check he had just pilfered, meanwhile studying her face closely for any signs that she recalled him as one who had dealt with her within the space of a minute or so. But nothing in her looks betrayed recognition or curiosity as she bestirred herself to reclaim the articles for which the check was a voucher of ownership, and to help him into them.

Ten seconds later Trencher, a personality transformed, stood quite at his ease on the top step of the flight outside the entrance to the Clarenden looking into Broadway. The long dark overcoat which he now wore, a commonplace roomy garment, fitted him as though it had been his own. With its collar turned up about his cheeks it helped admirably to disguise him. The soft black hat was a trifle large for his head. So much the better—it came well down over his face.

The huge illuminated hands of a clock set in the middle of a winking, blinking electric sign a few blocks north, at the triangular gore where Seventh Avenue crosses Broadway, told him the time—six minutes of eleven. To Trencher it seemed almost that hours must have passed since he shot down Sonntag, and yet here was proof that not more than ten minutes—or at the most, twelve—had elapsed. Well, he had worked fast and with results gratifying. The

spats that might have betrayed him were safely hidden in one place—yonder between the seat cushions of O'Gavin's car, which stood where he had left it, not thirty feet distant. His tell-tale overcoat and his derby hat were safely bestowed in the café check room behind him awaiting a claimant who meant never to return. Even if they should be found and identified as having been worn by the slayer of Sonntag, their presence there, he figured, would but serve to confuse the man hunt. Broadway's living tides flowed by, its component atoms seemingly ignorant of the fact that just round the corner below a man had been done to death. Only at the intersection of Thirty-ninth Street was there evidence, in the quick movement of pedestrians out of Broadway into the cross street, that something unusual served to draw foot passengers off their course.

In front of the clothing shop three doors south of him no special congestion of traffic revealed itself; no scrouging knot of citizens was to be seen, and by that Trencher reasoned that the negro had been taken elsewhere by his captors—very probably to where the body would still be lying, hunched up in the shadow before the Jollity's side doors. From the original starting point the hunt doubtlessly was now reorganising. One thing was certain—it had not eddied back this far. The men of the law would be working on a confused basis yet awhile, anyhow. And Trencher meant to

twistify the clews still further, for all that he felt safe enough already. For the first time a sense of security exhilarated him. Almost it was a sense of exultation.

He descended the steps and went straight to the nearest of the rank of parked taxicabs. Its driver was nowhere in sight. A carriage starter for the café, in gorgeous livery, understood without being told what the tall muffled-up gentleman desired and blew a shrill blast on a whistle. At that the truant driver appeared, coming at a trot from down the street.

"'Scuse me, mister," he said as he mounted to his seat at the wheel. "Been a shootin' down the street. Guy got croaked, they say, and they can't find the guy that croaked um."

"Never mind the shooting," said Trencher as he climbed into the cab, whose door the starter had opened for him.

"Where to, gent?"

"Harty's Palm Garden," said Trencher, naming a restaurant a mile and a half away, straight up Broadway. His main thought now was to get entirely out of this part of town.

Riding along uptown Trencher explored the pockets of the pilfered overcoat. The search produced a pair of heavy gloves, a wadded handkerchief, two cigars, a box of matches, and, last of all, a triangular brass token inscribed with a number and a firm name. Without the imprint of the name Trencher would have recognised it, from its shape alone. It

had come from the check room in the upper-tier waiting room of the Grand Central Station. Discovery of it gave him a new idea—an idea involving no added risk but having in it added possibilities for insuring the ultimate success of his get-away. In any event there could be neither harm nor enhanced danger in putting it into execution.

Therefore, when he had emerged from the cab at Harty's and had paid the fare and had seen the driver swing his vehicle about and start off back downtown, he walked across Columbus Circle to the west curve of it, climbed into another taxicab and was driven by way of Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue to the Grand Central. Here at the establishment of the luggage-checking concessionaire on the upper level of the big terminal he tendered the brass token to a drowsy-eyed attendant, receiving in exchange a brown-leather suit case with letters stenciled on one end of it, like this:

M. K. P.
STAMFORD, CONN.

Waving aside a red-capped negro porter, Trencher, carrying the spoil of his latest coup, departed via one of the Vanderbilt Avenue exits. Diagonally across the avenue was a small drug store still open for business at this hour, as the bright lights within proved. Above its door showed the small blue sign that marked

it as containing a telephone pay booth. For Trencher's purposes a closed booth in a small mercantile establishment was infinitely to be preferred to the public exchange in the terminal—less chance that the call could be traced back to its source, less chance, too, that some inquisitive operator, trying to kill time during a dull hour, might listen in on the wire, and so doing overhear things not meant for her ears. He crossed over and entered the drug store.

Except for a sleepy clerk at the rear there was no one visible within the place. Trencher crowded his bulk into the booth, dropped the requisite coin in the slot and very promptly got back the answering hail from a certain number that he had called—a number at a place in the lower fringe of the old Tenderloin.

"Is that the Three Deuces?" asked Trencher. Then: "Who's speaking—you, Monty? . . . Know who this is, at this end? . . . Yes, that's right. Say, is the Kid there—Kid Dineen? . . . Good! Call him to the phone, will you, Monty? And tell him to hurry—it's devilish important."

A short pause followed and when Trencher spoke again he had dropped his voice to a cautious half-whisper, vibrant and tense with urgency. Also now he employed some of the argot of the underworld:

"Hello, Kid, hello! Recognise my voice, don't you? . . . Good! Now listen: I'm in a jam. . . . What? . . . Never mind what it

is; you'll know when you see the papers in the morning if you don't know sooner. I've got to lam, and lam quick. Right now I've got the bulls stalled off good and proper, but I can't tell how long they'll stay stalled off. Get me? So I don't want to be showing my map round any ticket windows. So here's what I want you to do. Get some coin off of Monty, if you haven't got enough on you. Then you beat it over to the Pennsylvania Station and buy me a ticket for Pittsburgh and a section in the sleeper on the train that leaves round one-twenty-five to-night. Then go over on Ninth Avenue to Silver's place——What? . . . Yes; sure, that's the place. Wait for me there in the little room upstairs over the bar, on the second floor. They've got to make a bluff of closing up at one, but you know how to get up into the room, don't you? . . . Good! Wait for me till I show up, or if I get there first I'll wait for you. I ought to show inside of an hour from now—maybe in less time than that if things keep on breaking right. Then I'll get the ducats off of you and beat it across through the Hudson Tube to the Manhattan Transfer and grab the rattler over there in Jersey when she comes along from this side. That'll be all. Now hustle!"

From the drug store he went, carrying the brown suit case with him, round into Forty-second Street. He had taken a mental note of the initials on the bag, but to make sure he

was right he looked at them again before he entered the big Bellhaven Hotel by its Forty-second-Street door. At sight of him a bell boy ran across the lobby and took from him his burden. The boy followed him, a pace in the rear, to the desk, where a spruce young gentleman awaited their coming. "Can I get a room with bath for the night—a quiet inside room where I'll be able to sleep as late as I please in the morning?" inquired Trencher.

"Certainly, sir." The room clerk appraised Trencher with a practiced eye. "Something for about four dollars?"

"That'll do very well," agreed Trencher, taking the pen which the clerk had dipped in ink and handed over to him.

Bearing in mind the letters and the address on the suit case, Trencher registered as M. K. Potter, Stamford, Conn. Meanwhile the clerk had taken a key from a rack containing a vast number of similar keys.

"I won't leave a call—and I don't want to be disturbed," warned Trencher.

"Very well, sir. Front! Show the gentleman to 1734." Five minutes later Trencher, in an inner room on the seventeenth floor, with the door locked on the inside, had sprung the catch of the brown suit case and was spreading its contents out upon the bed, smiling his satisfaction as he did so. Plainly fortune was favouring him at each new turning.

For here was a somewhat rumpled black suit

and along with it a blue-striped shirt, showing slight signs of recent wear, a turndown collar that was barely soiled, and a plain black four-in-hand tie. Trencher went through the pockets of the suit, finding several letters addressed to Marcus K. Parker at an address in Broad Street, down in the financial district. Sewn in the lining of the inner breast pocket of the coat was a tailor's label also bearing the same name. At the sight Trencher grinned. He had not missed it very far. He had registered as Potter, whereas now he knew that the proper owner of the suit case must be named Parker.

Parker, he figured, belonged to the race of commuters; evidently he lived in Stamford and did business in New York. Accepting this as the correct hypothesis the rest of the riddle was easy to read. Mr. Parker, coming to town that morning, had brought with him his dinner rig in a suit case.

Somewhere, probably at his office, he had changed from his everyday garb to the clothes he brought with him, then he had packed his street clothes into the bag and brought it uptown with him and checked it at the Grand Central, intending after keeping his evening engagements to reclaim the baggage before catching a late train for Stamford.

Fine! Results from Trencher's standpoint could hardly have been more pleasing. Exulting inwardly over the present development and

working fast, he stripped off his clothing down to his shoes and his undergarments—first, though, emptying his own pockets of the money they contained, both bills and silver, and of sundry personal belongings, such as a small pocketknife, a fountain pen, a condensed railway guide and the slip of pasteboard that represented the hat and coat left behind at the Clarenden. Then he put on the things that had come out of the Stamford man's bag—the shirt, the collar and the tie, and finally the outer garments, incidentally taking care to restore to Parker's coat pocket all of Parker's letters.

This done he studied himself in the glass of the chiffonier and was deeply pleased. Mirrored there he saw a different man from the one who had rented the room. When he quit this hotel, as presently he meant to do, he would not be Trencher, the notorious confidence man who had shot a fellow crook, nor yet would he be the Thompson who had sent a darky for a bag, nor the Tracy who had picked a guest's pocket at a fashionable restaurant, nor yet the Potter who had engaged a room with bath for a night. From overcoat and hat to shoes and undergarments he would be Mr. Marcus K. Parker, a thoroughly respectable gentleman, residing in the godly town of Stamford and engaged in reputable mercantile pursuits in Broad Street—with opened mail in his pocket to prove it.

The rest would be simplicity. He had merely to slip out of the hotel, carrying the key to 1734 with him. Certainly it would be as late as noon the following day before chambermaid or clerk tried to rouse the supposed occupant of the empty room. In all likelihood it would be later than noon. He would have at least twelve hours' start, even though the authorities were nimble-witted enough to join up the smaller mystery of an abandoned suit case belonging to one man and an abandoned outfit of clothing belonging to another, with the greater and seemingly unconnected mystery of the vanishment of the suspect in the Sonntag homicide case. Long before this potential eventuality could by any chance develop, he meant, under another name and in another disguise, to be hidden away at a quiet boarding house that he knew of in a certain obscure factory town on a certain trolley line leading out from Pittsburgh.

Now to clear out. He bestowed in various pockets his money, his knife, his pen and his railway guide, not one of these having upon it any identifying marks; he pouched his small change and his roll of bills. Nothing remained to be disposed of or accounted for save the pasteboard square that represented the coat and hat left behind at the Clarenden. When this had been torn into fine and indistinguishable bits and when as a final precaution the fragments had been tossed out of the window, the last possible evidence to link the pseudo Parker

with the real Trencher in this night's transactions would be gone.

He had the slip in his hands and his fingers were in the act of twisting it in halves when the thought that something had been overlooked—something vitally important—came to him; and he paused to cogitate. What had been forgotten? What had he overlooked? What had he left undone that should have been done? Then suddenly appreciation of the thing missing came to him and in a quick panic of apprehension he felt through all the pockets of Parker's suit and through the pockets of his own garments, where he had flung them down on the bed, alongside the rifled suit case.

His luck piece was gone—that was it! The old silver trade dollar, worn thin and smooth by years of handling and with the hole drilled through the centre of it—that was what was gone—his token, his talisman, his charm against evil fortune. He had carried it for years, ever since he had turned crook, and for nothing in this world would he have parted from it.

In a mounting flurry of superstitious terror he searched the pockets again, with fingers that shook—this man who had lost faith in human beings, who had no hope and no fear for the hereafter, who had felt no stabs of regret or repentance for having killed a man, whose thoughts had never known remorse for any misdeed of his. The second hunt and the

third and the fourth were fruitless as his first one had been; Trencher's luck piece was gone.

Those wise men, the alienists, say that all of us are insane on certain subjects, however sane we may be upon other subjects. Certainly in the mental composition of every one of us is some quirk, some vagary, some dear senseless delusion, avowed or private. As for Trencher, the one crotchet in his cool brain centred about that worthless trade dollar. With it in his possession he had counted himself a winner, always. Without it he felt himself to be a creature predestined and foreordained to disaster.

To it he gave all the credit for the fact that he had never served a prison sentence. But once, and once only, had he parted company with it, even temporarily. That was the time when Murtha, that crafty old Central-Office hand, had picked him up on general principles, had taken him to headquarters, and first stripping him of all the belongings on his person, had carried him to the Bertillon Bureau, and then and there, without shadow of legal right, since Trencher was neither formally accused of nor formally indicted for any offence and had no previous record of convictions, had forced him to undergo the ordeals, ethically so repugnant to the instincts of the professional thief, of being measured and finger-printed and photographed, side face and full face. He had cursed and protested and pleaded when Murtha

confiscated the luck piece; he had rejoiced when Murtha, seeing no harm in the thing, had restored it to him before lodging him in a cell under the all-embracing technical charge of being a suspicious person. Because he had so speedily got it back, Trencher had gone free again with the loss of but two days of liberty—or anyway, so Trencher firmly believed. But because it had left his custody for no more than an hour his pictures were now in the Gallery, and Murtha had learned the secret of Trencher's one temperamental weakness, one fetish.

And now—at this time, of all times—it was gone again. But where had it gone? Where could it have gone? Mentally he reconstructed all his acts, all his movements since he had risen that morning and dressed—and then the solution came to him, and with the solution complete remembrance. He had slipped it into the right-hand pocket of the new tan-coloured topcoat—to impregnate the garment with good luck and to enhance the prospects for a successful working-out of the scheme to despoil the Wyoming cattleman; and he had left it there. And now here he was up on the seventeenth floor of the Bellhaven Hotel and the fawn-coloured coat with the luck piece in one of its pockets dangled on a hook in the cloak booth of the Clarenden café, less than a block away from the spot where he had shot Sonntag.

He marvelled that without his talisman he had escaped arrest up to now; it was incon-

ceivable that he had won his way thus far. But then the answer to that was, of course, that he had retained the pasteboard square that stood for possession of the coat itself. He gave thanks to the unclean spirits of his superstition that apprehension of his loss had come to him before he destroyed the slip. Had he gone ahead and torn it up he would now count himself as doomed. But he hadn't torn it up. There it lay on the white coverlet of the bed.

He must make a try to recover his luck piece; no other course occurred to him. Trying would be beset with hazards, accumulated and thickening. He must venture back into the dangerous territory; must dare deadfalls and pitfalls; must run the chance of possible traps and probable nets. By now the police might have definitely ascertained who it was that killed Sonntag; or lacking the name of the slayer they might have secured a reasonably complete description of him; might have spread the general alarm for a man of such and such a height and such and such a weight, with such a nose and such eyes and such hair and all the rest of it. It might be that the Clarenden was being watched, along with the other public resorts in the immediate vicinity of where the homicide had been committed. It might even be that back in the Clarenden he would encounter the real Parker face to face. Suppose Parker had finished his supper and had dis-

covered his loss—losses rather—and had made a complaint to the management; and suppose as a result of Parker's indignation that members of the uniformed force had been called in to adjudicate the wrangle; suppose through sheer coincidence Parker should see Trencher and should recognise the garments that Trencher wore as his own. Suppose any one of a half dozen things. Nevertheless, he meant to go back. He would take certain precautions—for all the need of haste, he must take them—but he would go back.

He put the pink check into his waistcoat pocket, switched out the room light, locked the door of the room on the outside, took the key with him and went down in an elevator, taking care to avoid using the same elevator that shortly before brought him up to this floor level. Presently he was outside the hotel, hurrying afoot on his return to Broadway. On the way he pitched the key into an areaway.

Turning out of Forty-second Street into Broadway and thence going south to a point just below the intersection with Fortieth Street, he approached the Clarenden from the opposite side of Broadway. There was motive in this. One coming across from the opposite side and looking upward at a diagonal slant could see through the windows along the front side of the Clarenden with some prospect of making out the faces of such diners as sat at tables near the windows. Straining his eyes as he crossed

over, Trencher thought he recognised his man. He was almost sure he made out the outlined head and shoulders of Parker sitting at a corner table alongside the last window in the row. He trusted he was right and trusted still more fervently that Parker would bide where he was for three or four minutes longer.

Tucking his head well down inside his upturned collar and giving the brim of his hat a tug to bring it still farther forward over his eyes, he took a long breath, like a man preparing for a dive in cold water, and went up the flight of stairs from the sidewalk into the building. No one inside made as if to halt him; no one so far as he could tell gave him in passing even an impersonal look. There was a wash room, as Trencher knew, at the back end of the ornate hall which separated the Chinese lounge and the main café on one side, from the private dining rooms and tea rooms on the other. That wash room was his present destination.

He reached it without mishap, to find it deserted except for a boy in buttons. To the boy he surrendered hat and overcoat, and then in the midst of a feint at hitching up his shirt cuffs, as though meaning to wash his hands, he snapped his fingers impatiently.

"I forgot something," he said for the boy's benefit; "left it in the café. Say, kid, watch my hat and coat, will you? I'll be back in a minute."

"Yes, sir," promised the youth. "I'll take good care of 'em."

Bareheaded as he now was and lacking the overcoat, Trencher realised the chief elements of his disguise were missing; still there had been for him no other course to follow than this risky one. He could not claim ownership of one coat and one hat while wearing another coat and another hat—that was certain. As he neared his goal he noted that both the maids on the outside of the booth were for the instant engaged in helping the members of a group of men and women on with their outdoor wraps. So much the better for him. He headed straight for the third girl of the force, the one whose station was within the open-fronted booth. In front of her on the flat shelf intervening between them he laid down the numbered pink slip, which in the scheme of his hopes and fears stood for so much.

"Never mind my hat, miss," he said, making his tone casual; "I'm not through with my supper yet. But just let me have my coat for one minute, will you, please? I want to get something out of one of the pockets to show to a friend."

There was nothing unusual, nothing unconventional about the request. The girl glanced at the figures on the check, then stepped back into her cuddy, seeking among rows of burdened hooks for whatsoever articles would be on the hook bearing corresponding figures. To Tren-

cher, dreading the advent of the Stamford man out of the Chinese room alongside him and yet not daring to turn his head to look, it seemed she was a very long time finding the hook. In reality the time she took was to be gauged by seconds rather than by minutes.

"Is this the garment you desired, sir?" Speaking with an affected English drawl and with neither curiosity nor interest in her face, the girl laid across her counter the tan-coloured overcoat, one of its big smoked-pearl buttons glinting dimly iridescent in the light as she spread it out.

"That's it, thank you. Just one moment and I'll give it back to you."

Trencher strove to throttle and succeeded fairly well in throttling the eager note in his voice as he took up the coat by its collar in his left hand.

The fingers trembled in spite of him as he thrust his right hand into the right-hand pocket. Twitching and groping they closed on what was hidden there—a slick, cool, round, flat, thin object, trade-dollar size. At the touch of the thing he sought and for all, too, that he stood in such perilous case, Trencher's heart jumped with relief and gratification. No need for him to look to make sure that he had his luck piece. He knew it by its feel and its heft and its size; besides the tip of one finger, sliding over its smooth rimless surface, had found in the centre of it the depression of the worn hole, and the

sensitive nerves had flashed the news to his brain. He slid it into a trousers pocket and passed the coat back to the girl; and almost before she had restored it to its appointed hook, Trencher had regained the shelter of the wash room and was repossessing himself of the slouch hat and the long black overcoat.

Back once more to the street he made the journey safely, nothing happening on the way out into the November night to alarm him. The winking, blinking electrically jewelled clock in the sign up the street told him it was just five minutes past midnight. He headed north, but for a few rods only. At Fortieth Street he turned west for a short block and at Seventh Avenue he hailed a south-bound trolley car. But before boarding the car he cast a quick backward scrutiny along the route he had come. Cabs moved to and fro, shuttle fashion, but seemingly no pedestrians were following behind him.

He was not particularly fearful of being pursued. Since he had cleared out from the Clarenden without mishap it was scarcely to be figured that anyone would or could now be shadowing him. He felt quite secure again—as secure as he had felt while in the locked room in the Bellhaven, because now he had in his custody that which gave him, in double and triple measure, the sense of assurance. One hand was thrust deep into his trousers pocket,

where it caressed and fondled the flat perforated disk that was there. It pleased him to feel the thing grow warmer under his fingers, guaranteeing him against mischance. He did not so much as twist his head to glance out of the car window as the car passed Thirty-ninth Street.

At Thirtieth Street he got off the car and walked west to Silver's place. Ninth Avenue was almost empty and, as compared with Broadway, lay in deep shadows. The lights of the bar, filtering through the filmed glass in one window of Silver's, made a yellowish blur in what was otherwise a row of blank, dead house fronts. Above the saloon the squatty three-story building was all dark, and from this circumstance Trencher felt sure he had come to the rendezvous before the Kid arrived. Alongside the saloon door he felt his way into a narrow entryway that was as black as a coal bunker and went up a flight of wooden steps to the second floor. At the head of the steps he fumbled with his hand until he found a doorknob. As he knew, this door would not be locked except from the inside; unless it contained occupants it was never locked. He knew, too, what furniture it contained—one table and three or four chairs. Steering a careful course to avoid bumping into the table, which, as he recalled, should be in the middle of the floor, he found the opposite wall and, after a moment's search with his hands, a single

electric bulb set in a wall bracket. He flipped on the light.

"That's right," said a voice behind him. "Now that you've got your mitts up, keep 'em up!"

As regards the position of his hands Trencher obeyed. He turned his head though, and over his shoulder he looked into the middle-aged face of Murtha, of the Central Office. Murtha's right hand was in his coat pocket and Trencher knew that Murtha had him covered—through the cloth of the coat.

"Hello, Murtha," said Trencher steadily enough, "what's the idea?"

"The idea is for you to stand right where you are without making any breaks until I get through frisking you," said Murtha.

On noiseless feet he stepped across the floor, Trencher's back being still to him, and one of his hands, the left one, with deft movements shifted about over Trencher's trunk, searching for a weapon.

"Got no gat on you, eh?" said Murtha. "Well, that's good. Now then, bring your hands down slow, and keep 'em close together. That's it—slow. I'm taking no chances, understand, and you'd better not take any either."

Again Trencher obeyed. Still standing behind him Murtha slipped his arms about Trencher's middle and found first one of Trencher's wrists and then the other. There was a subdued clicking of steel mechanisms.

"Now then," said Murtha, falling back a pace or two, "I guess you can turn round if you want to."

Trencher turned round. He glanced at his hands, held in enforced companionship by the short chain of the handcuffs, and then steadily at his captor.

"Why so fussy, Murtha?" he asked in a slightly contemptuous tone. "You never heard of me starting any rough stuff when there was a pinch coming off, did you?"

"That's true," said the detective; "but when a gun's just bumped off one guy he's liable to get the habit of bumping off other guys. Even a swell gun like you is. So that's why I've been just a trifle particular."

"You're crazy, man! Who says I bumped anybody off?"

"I do, for one," replied Murtha cheerfully. "Still that's neither here nor there, unless you feel like telling me all about what came off over in Thirty-ninth Street to-night.

"You've always been a safety player so far as I know—and I'm curious to know what made you start in using a cannon on folks all of a sudden. At that, I might guess—knowing Sonntag like I did."

"I don't know what you're talking about," parried Trencher. "I tell you you've got me wrong. You can't frame me for something I didn't do. If somebody fixed Sonntag it wasn't me. I haven't seen

him since yesterday. I'm giving it to you straight."

"Oh well, we won't argue that now," said Murtha affably. In his manner was something suggestive of the cat that has caught the king of the rats. A tremendous satisfaction radiated from him. "You can stall some people, son, but you can't stall me. I've got you and I've got the goods on you—that's sufficient. But before you and me glide down out of here together and start for the front office I'd like to talk a little with you. Set down, why don't you, and make yourself comfortable?" He indicated a chair.

Trencher took the chair and Murtha, after springing a catch which he found on the inner side of the door, sat down in another.

"I've got to hand it to you, Trencher," went on the detective admiringly. "You sure do work swift. You didn't lose much time climbing into that outfit you're wearing. How did you get into it so quick? And, putting one thing with another, I judge you made a good fast get-away too. Say, listen, Trencher, you might as well come clean with me. I'll say this for Sonntag—he's been overdue for a croaking this long time. If I've got to spare anybody out of my life I guess it might as well be him—that's how I stand. He belonged to the Better-Dead Club to start with, Sonntag did. If it was self-defence and you can prove it, I've got no kick coming. All I want is the

credit for nailing you all by my lonesome. Why not slip me the whole tale now, and get it off your chest? You don't crave for any of this here third-degree stuff down at headquarters, and neither do I. Why not spill it to me now and save trouble all round?"

His tone was persuasive, wheedling, half friendly. Trencher merely shook his head, forcing a derisive grin to his lips.

"Can the bull, Murtha," he said. "You haven't got a thing on me and you know it."

"Is that so? Well, just to play the game fair, suppose I tell you some of the things I've got on you—some of them. But before I start I'm going to tell you that your big mistake was in coming back to where you'd left that nice new yellow overcoat of yours. Interested, eh?" he said, reading the expression that came into Trencher's face in spite of Trencher's efforts. "All right then, I'll go on. You had a good prospect of getting out of town before daylight, but you chucked your chance when you came back to the Clarenden a little while ago. But at that I was expecting you; in fact, I don't mind telling you that I was standing behind some curtains not fifteen feet from that check room when you showed up. I could have grabbed you then, of course, but just between you and me I didn't want to run the risk of having to split the credit fifty-fifty with any bull, in harness or out of it, that might come butting in. The neighbourhood was lousy

with cops and plain-clothes men hunting for whoever it was that bumped off Sonntag; they're still there, I guess, hunting without knowing who it is they're looking for, and without having a very good description of you, either. I was the only fellow that had the right dope, and that came about more by accident than anything else. So I took a chance, myself. I let you get away and then I trailed you—in a taxi.

"All the time you was on that street car I was riding along right behind you, and I came up these steps here not ten feet behind you. I wanted you all for myself and I've got you all by myself."

"You don't hate yourself, exactly, do you?" said Trencher. "Well, without admitting anything—because there's nothing to admit—I'd like to know, if you don't mind, how you dope it out that I had anything to do with Sonntag's being killed—that is if you're not lying about him being killed?"

"I don't mind," said Murtha blithely. "It makes quite a tale, but I can boil it down. I wasn't on duty to-night—by rights this was a night off for me. I had a date at the Clarenden at eleven-thirty to eat a bite with a brother-in-law of mine and a couple of friends of his—a fellow named Simons and a fellow named Parker, from Stamford.

"I judge it's Parker's benny and dicer you're wearing now.

"Well, anyhow, on my way to the Clarenden about an hour or so ago I butt right into the middle of all the hell that's being raised over this shooting in Thirty-ninth Street. One of the precinct plain-clothes men that's working on the case tells me a tall guy in a brown derby hat and a short yellow overcoat is supposed to have pulled off the job. That didn't mean anything to me, and even if it had I wouldn't have figured you out as having been mixed up in it. Anyway, it's no lookout of mine. So I goes into the Clarenden and has a rarebit and a bottle of beer with my brother-in-law and the others.

"About half-past eleven we all start to go, and then this party, Parker, can't find his coat check. He's sure he stuck it in his vest pocket when he blew in, but it ain't there. We look for it on the floor but it's not there, either. Then all of a sudden Parker remembers that a man in a brown derby, with a coat turned inside out over his arm, who seemed to be in a hurry about something, came into the Clarenden along with him, and that a minute later in that Chinese room the same fellow butts into him. That gives me an idea, but I don't tell Parker what's on my mind. I sends the head waiter for the house detective, and when the house detective comes I show him my badge, and on the strength of that he lets me and Parker go into the cloak room. Parker's hoping to find his own coat and I'm pretending to help him look

for it, but what I'm really looking for is a brown derby hat and a short yellow coat—and sure enough I find 'em. But Parker can't find his duds at all; and so in putting two and two together it's easy for me to figure how the switch was made. I dope it out that the fellow who lifted Parker's check and traded his duds for Parker's is the same fellow who fixed Sonntag's clock. Also I've got a pretty good line on who that party is; in fact I practically as good as know who it is.

"So I sends Parker and the others back to the table to smoke a cigar and stick round awhile, and I hang round the door keeping out of sight behind them draperies where I can watch the check room. Because, you see, Trencher, I knew you were the guy and I knew you'd come back—if you could get back."

He paused as though expecting a question, but Trencher stayed silent and Murtha kept on.

"And now I'm going to tell you how I come to know you was the right party. You remember that time about two years ago when I ran you in as a suspect and down at headquarters you bellyached so loud because I took a bum old coin off of you? Well, when I went through that yellow overcoat and found your luck piece, as you call it, in the right-hand pocket, I felt morally sure, knowing you like I did, that as soon as you missed it you'd be coming back to try to find it. And sure enough you did come back. Simple, ain't it?

"The only miscalculation I made was in figuring that when you found it gone from the pocket you'd hang round making a hunt for it on the floor or something. You didn't though. I guess maybe you lost your nerve when you found it wasn't in that coat pocket. Is that right?"

"But I did find it!" exclaimed Trencher, fairly jostled out of his pose by these last words from his gloating captor. "I've got it now!"

Murtha's hand stole into his trousers pocket and fondled something there.

"What'll you bet you've got it now?" he demanded gleefully. "What'll you bet?"

"I'll bet my life—that's all," answered Trencher. "Here, I'll show you!"

He stood up. Because his wrists were chained he had to twist his body sidewise before he could slip one hand into his own trousers pocket.

He groped in its depths and then brought forth something and held it out in his palm.

The poor light of the single electric bulb glinted upon an object which threw off dulled translucent tints of bluish-green—not a trade dollar, but a big overcoat button the size of a trade dollar—a flat, smooth, rimless disk of smoked pearl with a tiny depression in the middle where the thread holes went through. For a little space of time both of them with their heads bent forward contemplated it.

Then with a flirt of his manacled hands

Trencher flung it away from him, and with a sickly pallor of fright and surrender stealing up under the skin of his cheeks he stared at the detective.

"You win, Murtha," he said dully. "What's the use bucking the game after your luck is gone? Come on, let's go down-town. Yes, I bumped off Sonntag."

CHAPTER V

QUALITY FOLKS

IN OUR town formerly there were any number of negro children named for Caucasian friends of their parents. Some bore for their names the names of old masters of the slavery time, masters who had been kindly and gracious and whose memories thereby were affectionately perpetuated; these were mainly of a generation now growing into middle age. Others—I am speaking still of the namesakes, not of the original bearers of the names—had been christened with intent to do honour to indulgent and well-remembered employers of post-bellum days. Thus it might befall, for example, that Wadsworth Junius Courtney, Esquire, would be a prominent advocate practicing at the local bar and that Wadsworth Junius Courtney Jones, of colour, would be his janitor and sweep out his office for him. Yet others had been named after white children—and soon after—for the reason that the white children had been given first names having a fine, full, sonorous sound or else a fascinatingly novel sound.

Of these last there were instances amounting in the aggregate to a small host.

I seem to remember, for example, that once a pink girl-mite came into the world by way of a bedroom in a large white house on Tilghman Avenue and was at the baptismal font sentenced for life to bear the Christian name of Rowena Hildegarde.

Or is Rowena Hildegarde a Christian name?

At any rate, within twelve months' time, there were to be found in more crowded and less affluent quarters of our thriving little city four more Rowena Hildegardes, of tender years, or rather, tender months—two black ones, one chrome-yellow one, and one sepia-brown one.

But so far as the available records show there was but one white child in our town who bore for its name, bestowed upon it with due knowledge of the fact and with deliberate intent, the name of a person of undoubted African descent. However, at this stage to reveal the circumstances governing this phenomenon would be to run ahead of our tale and to precipitate its climax before the groundwork were laid for its premise. Most stories should start at the beginning. This one must.

From round the left-hand corner of the house came with a sudden blare the sound of melody—words and music—growing steadily louder as the unseen singer drew nearer. The music was a lusty, deep-volumed camp-meeting air,

with long-drawn quavers and cadences in it. The words were as follows:

Had a lovin' mother,
Been climbin' up de hill so long;
She been hopin' git to heaben in due time
Befo' dem heaben do's close!

And then the chorus, voicing first a passionate entreaty, then rising in the final bars to a great exultant shout:

Den chain dat lion down, Good Lawd!
Den chain dat lion down!
Oh, please!
Good Lawd, done chained dat lion down!
Done chained dat deadly lion down!
Glor-e-e-e!

The singer, still singing, issued into view, limping slightly—a wizen woman, coal-black and old, with a white cloth bound about her head, turban fashion, and a man's battered straw hat resting jauntily upon the knotted kerchief. Her calico frock was voluminous, unshapely and starch-clean. Her under lip was shoved forward as though permanently twisted into a spout-shape by the task of holding something against the gums of her lower front teeth, and from one side of her mouth protruded a bit of wood with the slivered bark on it. One versed in the science of forestry might have recognised

the little stub of switch as a peach-tree switch; one bred of the soil would have known its purpose. Neither puckered-out lip nor peach-tree twig seemed to interfere in the least with her singing. She flung the song out past them—over the lip, round the twig.

With her head thrown away back, her hands resting on her bony hips, and her feet clunking inside a pair of boys' shoes too large for her, she crossed the lawn at an angle. In all things about her—in her gait, despite its limp, in her pose, her figure—there was something masterful, something dominating, something tremendously proud. Considering her sparseness of bulk she had a most astoundingly big strong voice, and in the voice as in the strut was arrogant pride.

She crossed the yard and let herself out of a side gate opening upon an empty side street and went out of sight and ultimately out of hearing down the side street in the hot sunshine of the late afternoon. But before she was out of hearing she had made it plain that not only a loving mother and a loving father, but likewise a loving brother and a loving sister, a loving nephew and a loving uncle, a loving grandmother and divers other loving relatives—had all been engaged in the hill-climbing pilgrimage along a lion-guarded path.

The hush that succeeded her departure was a profound hush; indeed, by comparison with the clamorous outburst that had gone before it seemed almost ghastly. Not even the

shrieks of the caucusing blue jays that might now be heard in the oak trees upon the lawn, where they were holding one of their excited powwows, served to destroy the illusion that a dead quiet had descended upon a spot lately racked by loud sounds. The well-dressed young man who had been listening with the air of one intent on catching and memorising the air, settled back in the hammock in which he was stretched behind the thick screen of vines that covered the wide front porch of the house.

"The estimable Aunt Charlotte appears to be in excellent voice and spirits to-day," he said with a wry smile. "I don't know that I ever heard her when her top notes carried farther than they did just now."

The slender black-haired girl who sat alongside him in a porch chair winced.

"It's perfectly awful—I know it," she lamented. "I suppose if Mildred and I have asked her once not to carry on like that here at the front of the house we've asked her a hundred times. It's bad enough to have her whooping like a wild Indian in the kitchen. But it never seems to do any good."

"Why don't you try getting rid of her altogether as a remedy?" suggested the young man.

"Get rid of Aunt Sharley! Why, Harvey—why, Mr. Winslow, I mean—we couldn't do that! Why, Aunt Sharley has always been in our family! Why, she's just like one of us—just like our own flesh and blood! Why,

she used to belong to my Grandmother Helm before the war——"

"I see," he said dryly, breaking in on her. "She used to belong to your grandmother, and now you belong to her. The plan of ownership has merely been reversed, that's all. Tell me, Miss Emmy Lou, how does it feel to be a human chattel, with no prospect of emancipation?" Then catching the hurt look on her flushed face he dropped his raillery and hastened to make amends. "Well, never mind. You're the sweetest slave girl I ever met—I guess you're the sweetest one that ever lived. Besides, she's gone—probably won't be back for half an hour or so. Don't hitch your chair away from me—I've got something very important that I want to tell you—in confidence. It concerns you—and somebody else. It concerns me and somebody else—and yet only two persons are concerned in it."

He was wrong about the time, however, truthful as he may have been in asserting his desire to deal confidentially with important topics. Inside of ten minutes, which to him seemed no more than a minute, seeing that he was in love and time always speeds fast for a lover with his sweetheart, the old black woman came hurrying back up the side street, and turned in at the side gate and retraversed the lawn to the back of the old house, giving the vine-screened porch a swift searching look as she hobbled past its corner.

Her curiosity, if so this scrutiny was to be interpreted, carried her further. In a minute or two she suddenly poked her head out through the open front door. She had removed her damaged straw headgear, but still wore her kerchief. Hastily and guiltily the young man released his hold upon a slim white hand which somehow had found its way inside his own. The sharp eyes of the old negress snapped. She gave a grunt as she withdrew her head. It was speedily to develop, though, that she had not entirely betaken herself away. Almost immediately there came to the ears of the couple the creak-creak of a rocking-chair just inside the hall, but out of view from their end of the porch.

"Make the old beldam go away, won't you?" whispered the man.

"I'll try," she whispered back rather nervously. Then, raising her voice, she called out in slightly strained, somewhat artificial voice, which to the understanding of the annoyed young man in the hammock appeared to have almost a suggestion of apprehension in it:

"Is—is that you, Aunt Sharley?"

The answer was little more than a grunt.

"Well, Aunt Sharley, hadn't you better be seeing about supper?"

"Num'mine 'bout supper. Ise tendin' to de supper. Ise bound de supper'll be ready 'fo' you two chillens is ready fur to eat it."

Within, the chair continued to creak steadily.

The girl spread out her hands with a gesture of helplessness.

"You see how it is," she explained under her breath. "Auntie is so set in her ways!"

"And she's so set in that rocking-chair too," he retorted grimly. Saying what he said next, he continued to whisper, but in his whisper was a suggestion of the proprietorial tone. Also for the first time in his life he addressed her without the prefix of Miss before her name. This affair plainly was progressing rapidly, despite the handicaps of a withered black duenna in the immediate offing.

"Emmy Lou," he said, "please try again. Go in there yourself and speak to her. Be firm with her—for once. Make her get away from that door. She makes me nervous. Don't be afraid of the old nuisance. This is your house, isn't it—yours and your sister's? Well, then, I thought Southerners knew how to handle darkies. If you can handle this one, suppose you give me a small proof of the fact—right now!"

Reluctantly, as though knowing beforehand what the outcome would be, Emmy Lou stood up, revealing herself as a straight dainty figure in white. She entered the door. Outside in the hammock Harvey strained his ears to hear the dialogue. His sweetheart's voice came to him only in a series of murmurs, but for him there was no difficulty about distinguishing the replies, for the replies were pitched in a strident,

belligerent key which carried almost to the yard fence. From them he was able to guess with the utmost accuracy just what arguments against the presence of the negress the girl was making. This, then, was what he heard:

". . . Now, Mizz Emmy Lou, you mout jes' ez well hush up an' save yore breath. You knows an' I knows, even ef he don't know it, dat 'tain't proper fur no young man to be cotein' a young lady right out on a front po'ch widout no chaperoner bein' clost by. Quality folks don't do sech ez dat. Dat's why I taken my feet in my hand an' come hurryin' back yere f'um dat grocery sto' where I'd done went to git a bottle of lemon extractors. I seen yore sister settin' in dat Mistah B. Weil's candy sto', drinkin' ice-cream sody wid a passel of young folks, an' by dat I realise' I'd done lef' you 'lone in dis house wid a young man dat's a stranger yere, an' so I come right back. And yere I is, honey, and yere I stays. . . . Whut's dat you sayin'? De gen'l'man objec's? He do, do he?" The far-carrying voice rose shrilly and scornfully. "Well, let him! Dat's his privilege. Jes' let him keep on objectin' long ez he's a mind to. 'Tain't gwine 'fluence me none. . . . I don't keer none ef he do heah me. Mebbe it mout do him some good ef he do heah me. Hit'll do him good, too, ef he heed me, I lay to dat. Mebbe he ain't been raised de way we is down yere. Ef so, dat's his misfortune." The voice changed. "Whut would yore pore

daid mother say ef she knowed I wuz neglectin' my plain duty to you two lone chillen? Think I gwine run ary chancet of havin' you two gals talked about by all de low-down pore w'ite trash scandalisers in dis town? Well, I ain't, an' dat's flat. No, sir-ree, honey! You mout jes' ez well run 'long back out dere on dat front po'ch, 'ca'se I'm tellin' you I ain't gwine stir nary inch f'um whar I is twell yore sister git back yere."

Beaten and discomfited, with one hand up to a burning cheek, Emmy Lou returned to her young man. On his face was a queer smile.

"Did—did you hear what she said?" she asked, bending over him.

"Not being deaf I couldn't well help hearing. I imagine the people next door heard it, too, and are no doubt now enjoying the joke of it."

"Oh, I know she's impossible," admitted Emmy Lou, repeating her lament of a little while before, but taking care even in her mortification to keep her voice discreetly down. "There's no use trying to do anything with her. We've tried and tried and tried, but she just will have her way. She doesn't seem to understand that we've grown up—Mildred and I. She still wants to boss us just as she did when we were children. And she grows more crotchety and more exacting every day."

"And I—poor benighted Yank that I am—came down here filled with a great and burning sympathy for the down-trodden African."

Harvey said this as though speaking to himself.

The girl forgot her annoyance in her instinct to come to the defence of her black mentor.

"Oh, but she has been like a mother to us! After mamma died I don't know what we should have done—two girls left alone in this old house—if it hadn't been for Aunt Sharley. She petted us, she protected us, she nursed us when we were sick. Why, Harvey, she couldn't have been more loyal or more devoted or more self-sacrificing than she has been through all these years while we were growing up. I know she loves us with every drop of blood in her veins. I know she'd work her fingers to the bone for us—that she'd die in her tracks fighting for us. We try to remember the debt of gratitude we owe her now that she's getting old and fussy and unreasonable and all crippled with rheumatism."

She paused, and then, womanlike, she added a qualifying clause: "But I must admit she's terribly aggravating at times. It's almost unbearable to have her playing the noisy old tyrant day in and day out. I get awfully out of patience with her."

Over on Franklin Street the town clock struck.

"Six o'clock," said Harvey. Reluctantly he stirred and sat up in the hammock and reached for his hat.

"I could be induced, you know, if sufficiently pressed, to stay on for supper," he hinted. For one Northern born, young Mr. Harvey Winslow was fast learning the hospitable customs of the town of his recent adoption.

"I'd love to have you stay," stated Emmy Lou, "but—but"—she glanced over her shoulder toward the open door—"but I'm afraid of Auntie. She might say she wasn't prepared to entertain a visitor—'not fixed fur company' is the way she would put it. You see, she regards you as a person of great importance. That's why she's putting on so many airs now. If it was one of the home boys that I've known always that was here with me she wouldn't mind it a bit. But with you it's different, and she's on her dignity—riding her high horse. You aren't very much disappointed, are you? Besides, you're coming to supper to-morrow night. She'll fuss over you then, I know, and be on tiptoe to see that everything is just exactly right. I think Auntie likes you."

"Curious way she has of showing it then," said Harvey. "I guess I still have a good deal to learn about the quaint and interesting tribal customs of this country. Even so, my education is progressing by leaps and bounds—I can see that."

After further remarks delivered in a confidential undertone, the purport of which is none of our business, young Mr. Winslow took his departure from the Dabney homestead. Simul-

taneously the vigilant warder abandoned her post in the front hall and returned to her special domain at the back of the house. Left alone, the girl sat on the porch with her troubled face cupped in her hands and a furrow of perplexity spoiling her smooth white brow. Presently the gate latch clicked and her sister, a year and a half her junior, came up the walk. With half an eye anyone would have known them for sisters. They looked alike, which is another way of saying both of them were pretty and slim and quick in their movements.

"Hello, sis," said Mildred by way of greeting. She dropped into a chair, smoothing down the front of her white middy blouse and fanning her flushed face with the broad ends of her sailor tie. Then observing her sister's despondent attitude: "What are you in the dumps about? Has that new beau of yours turned out a disappointment? Or what?"

In a passionate little burst Emmy Lou's simmering indignation boiled up and overflowed.

"Oh, it's Aunt Sharley again! Honestly, Mil, she was absolutely unbearable this evening. It was bad enough to have her go stalking across the lawn with that old snuff stick of hers stuck in the corner of her mouth, and singing that terrible song of hers at the very top of her lungs and wearing that scandalous old straw hat stuck up on her topknot—that was bad enough, goodness knows! I don't know what sort of

people Har—Mr. Winslow thinks we must be! But that was only the beginning."

Followed a recapitulation of the greater grievance against the absent offender. Before Emmy Lou was done baring the burden of her complaint Mildred's lips had tightened in angered sympathy.

"It must have been just perfectly awfully horrible, Em," she said with a characteristic prodigality of adjectives when the other had finished her recital. "You just ought to give Aunt Sharley a piece of your mind about the way she behaves. And the worst of it is she gets worse all the time. Don't you think you're the only one she picks on. Why, don't you remember, Em, how just here only the other day she jumped on me because I went on the moonlight excursion aboard the *Sophie K. Foster* with Sidney Baumann?—told me right to my face I ought to be spanked and put to bed for daring to run round with 'codfish aristocracy'—the very words she used. What right has she, I want to know, to be criticising Sidney Baumann's people? I'm sure he's as nice a boy as there is in this whole town; seems to me he deserves all the more credit for working his way up among the old families the way he has. I don't care if his father was a nobody in this town when he first came here.

"Quality folks—quality folks! She's always preaching about our being quality folks and about it being wrong for us to demean our-

selves by going with anybody who isn't quality folks until I'm sick and tired of the words. She has quality folks on the brain! Does she think we are still babies? You're nearly twenty-three and I'm past twenty-one. We have our own lives to live. Why should we be so——"

She broke off at the sound of a limping footstep in the hall.

"Supper's ready," announced Aunt Sharley briefly. "You chillen come right in an' eat it whilst it's hot."

Strangely quiet, the two sisters followed the old negress back to the dining room. Aunt Sharley, who had prepared the meal, now waited upon them. She was glumly silent herself, but occasionally she broke, or rather she punctuated, the silence with little sniffs of displeasure. Only once did she speak, and this was at the end of the supper, when she had served them with blackberries and cream.

"Seem lak de cat done got ever'body's tongue round dis place to-night!" she snapped, addressing the blank wall above the older girl's head. "Well, 'tain't no use fur nobody to be poutin' an' sullin'. 'Tain't gwine do 'em no good. 'Tain't gwine budge me nary hair's brea'th frum whut I considers to be my plain duty. Ef folkses don't lak it so much de wuss fur dem, present company not excepted. Dat's my say an' I done said it!"

And out of the room she marched with her head held defiantly high.

That night there were callers. At the Dabney home there nearly always were callers of an evening, for the two sisters were by way of being what small-town society writers call reigning belles. Once, when they had first returned from finishing school the year before, a neighbouring lady, meeting Aunt Sharley on the street, had been moved to ask whether the girls had many beaus, and Aunt Sharley, with a boastful flirt of her under lip which made her side face look something like the profile of a withered but vainglorious dromedary, had answered back:

"Beaus? Huh! Dem chillens is got beaus frum ever' state!" Which was a slight overstretching of the real facts, but a perfectly pardonable and proper exaggeration in Aunt Charlotte's estimation. At home she might make herself a common scold, might be pestiferously officious and more than pestiferously noisy. Abroad her worshipful pride in, and her affection for, the pair she had reared shone through her old black face as though a lamp of many candle power burned within her. She might chide them at will, and she did, holding this to be her prerogative and her right, but whosoever spoke slightingly of either of them in her presence, be the speaker black or white, had Aunt Charlotte to fight right there on the spot; she was as ready with her fists and her teeth to

assert the right of her white wards to immunity from criticism as she was with her tongue lashings.

These things were all taken into consideration when Emmy Lou and Mildred came that night to balance the account for and against the old woman—so many, many deeds of thoughtfulness, of kindness, of tenderness on the credit side; so many flagrant faults, so many shortcomings of temper and behaviour on the debit page. The last caller had gone. Aunt Sharley, after making the rounds of the house to see to door boltings and window latchings, had hobbled upstairs to her own sleeping quarters over the kitchen wing, and in the elder sister's room, with the lights turned low, the two of them sat in their nightgowns on the side of Emmy Lou's bed and tried the case of Spinster Charlotte Helm, coloured, in the scales of their own youthful judgments. Without exactly being able to express the situation in words, both realised that a condition which verged upon the intolerable was fast approaching its climax.

Along with the impatience of youth and the thought of many grievances they had within them a natural instinct for fairness; a legacy perhaps from a father who had been just and a mother who had been mercifully kind and gentle. First one would play the part of devil's advocate, the while the other defended the accused, and then at the remembrance of

some one of a long record of things done or said by Aunt Sharley those attitudes would be reversed.

There were times when both condemned the defendant, their hair braids bobbing in emphasis of the intensity of their feelings; times when together they conjured up recollections of the everlasting debt that they owed her for her manifold goodnesses, her countless sacrifices on behalf of them. The average Northerner, of whatsoever social status, would have been hard put to it either to comprehend the true inwardness of the relationship that existed between these girls of one race and this old woman of another or to figure how there could be but one outcome. The average Southerner would have been able at once to sense the sentiments and the prejudices underlying the dilemma that now confronted the orphaned pair, and to sympathise with them, and with the old negress too.

To begin with, there were the fine things to be said for Aunt Charlotte; the arguments in her behalf—a splendid long golden list of them stretching back to their babyhood and beyond, binding them with ties stronger almost than blood ties to this faithful, loving, cantankerous, crotchety old soul. Aunt Charlotte had been born in servitude, the possession of their mother's mother. She had been their mother's handmaiden before their mother's marriage. Afterward she had been their own nurse,

cradling them in babyhood on her black breast, spoiling them, training them, ruling them, overruling them, too, coddling them when they were good, nursing them when they were ailing, scolding them and punishing them when they misbehaved.

After their father's death their mother, then an invalid, had advised as frequently with Aunt Sharley regarding the rearing of the two daughters as with the guardians who had been named in her husband's will—and with as satisfactory results. Before his death their father had urged his wife to counsel with Aunt Sharley in all domestic emergencies. Dying, he had signified his affectionate regard for the black woman by leaving her a little cottage with its two acres of domain near the railroad tracks. Regardless though of the fact that she was now a landed proprietor and thereby exalted before the eyes of her own race, Aunt Sharley had elected to go right on living beneath the Dabney roof. In the latter years of Mrs. Dabney's life she had been to all intents a copartner in the running of the house, and after that sweet lady's death she had been its manager in all regards. In the simple economies of the house she had indeed been all things for these past few years—housekeeper, cook, housemaid, even seamstress, for in addition to being a poetess with a cook-stove she was a wizard with a needle.

As they looked back now, casting up the tally of the remembered years, neither Emmy

Lou nor Mildred could recall an event in all their lives in which the half-savage, half-childish, altogether shrewd and competent negress had not figured after some fashion or other: as foster parent, as unofficial but none the less capable guardian, as confidante, as overseer, as dictator, as tirewoman who never tired of well-doing, as arbiter of big things and little—all these rôles, and more, too, she had played to them, not once, but a thousand times.

It was Aunt Sharley who had dressed them for their first real party—not a play-party, as the saying went down our way, but a regular dancing party, corresponding to a début in some more ostentatious and less favoured communities. It was Aunt Sharley who had skimped and scrimped to make the available funds cover the necessary expenses of the little household in those two or three lean years succeeding their mother's death, when dubious investments, which afterward turned out to be good ones, had chiseled a good half off their income from the estate. It was Aunt Sharley who, when the question of going away to boarding school rose, had joined by invitation in the conference on ways and means with the girls' guardians, Judge Priest and Doctor Lake, and had cast her vote and her voice in favour of the same old-fashioned seminary that their mother in her girlhood had attended. The sisters themselves had rather favoured an Eastern establishment as being more fashion-

able and smarter, but the old woman stood fast in her advocacy of the other school. What had been good enough for her beloved mistress was good enough for her mistress' daughters, she insisted; and, anyhow, hadn't the quality folks always gone there? Promptly Doctor Lake and Judge Priest sided with her; and so she had her way about this important matter, as she had it about pretty much everything else.

It was Aunt Sharley who had indignantly and jealously vetoed the suggestion that a mulatto sewing woman, famed locally for her skill, should be hired to assist in preparing the wardrobes that Emmy Lou and Mildred must take with them. It was Aunt Sharley who, when her day's duties were over, had sat up night after night until all hours, straining her eyes as she plied needle and scissors, basting and hemming until she herself was satisfied that her chillen's clothes would be as ample and as ornate as the clothes which any two girls at the boarding school possibly could be expected to have. It was Aunt Sharley who packed their trunks for them, who kissed them good-by at the station, all three of them being in tears, and who, when the train had vanished down the tracks to the southward, had gone back to the empty house, there to abide until they came home to her again. They had promised to write to her every week—and they had, too, except when they were too busy

or when they forgot it. Finally, it was Aunt Sharley who never let them forget that their grandfather had been a governor of the state, that their father had been a colonel in the Confederacy, and that they were qualified "to hole up they haids wid de fines' in de land."

When they came to this phase of the recapitulation there sprang into the minds of both of them a recollection of that time years and years in the past when Aunt Sharley, accompanying them on a Sunday-school picnic in the capacity of nursemaid, had marred the festivities by violently snatching Mildred out of a circle playing King Willyum was King James' Son just as the child was about to be kissed by a knickerbockered admirer who failed to measure up to Aunt Sharley's jealous requirements touching on quality folks; and, following this, had engaged in a fight with the disappointed little boy's coloured attendant, who resented this slur upon the social standing of her small charge. Aunt Sharley had come off victor in the bout, but the picnic had been spoiled for at least three youngsters. So much for Aunt Sharley's virtues—for her loyalty, her devotion, her unremitting faithfulness, her championship of their destinies, her stewardship over all their affairs. Now to turn the shield round and consider its darker side:

Aunt Sharley was hardly a fit candidate for canonisation yet. Either it was too early for that—or it was too late. She was unreasonable,

she was crotchety, she was contentious, she was incredibly intolerant of the opinions of others, and she was incredibly hardheaded. She had always been masterful and arrogant; now more and more each day she was becoming a shrew and a tyrant and a wrangler. She was frightfully noisy; she clarioned her hallelujah hymns at the top of her voice, regardless of what company might be in the house. She dipped snuff openly before friends of the girls and new acquaintances alike. She refused point-blank to wear a cap and apron when serving meals. She was forever quarrelling with the neighbours' servants, with delivery boys, with marketmen and storekeepers. By sheer obstinacy she defeated all their plans for hiring a second servant, declaring that if they dared bring another darky on the place she would take pleasure in scalding the interloper with a kettle of boiling water. She sat in self-imposed judgment upon their admirers, ruthlessly rejecting those courtiers who did not measure up to her arbitrary standards for appraising the local aristocracy; and toward such of the young squires as fell under the ban of her disfavour she deported herself in such fashion as to leave in their minds no doubt whatsoever regarding her hostility. In public she praised her wards; in private she alternately scolded and petted them. She was getting more feeble, now that age and infirmities were coming upon her, wherefore the house showed

the lack of proper care. They were afraid of her, though they loved her with all their hearts and knew she loved them to the exclusion of every living person; they were apprehensive always of her frequent and unrestrained outbreaks of temper. She shamed them and she humiliated them and she curbed them in perfectly natural impulses—impulses that to them seemed perfectly proper also.

Small enough were these faults when set up alongside the tally of her goodnesses; moreover, neither of the two rebels against her authority was lacking in gratitude. But it is the small things that are most annoying usually, and, besides, the faults of the old woman were things now of daily occurrence and recurrence, which chafed their nerves and fretted them, whereas the passage of time was lessening the sentimental value of her earlier labours and sacrifices in their behalf.

And here was another thing: While they had been getting older Aunt Sharley had been getting old; they had grown up, overnight, as it were, and she could not be made to comprehend the fact. In their case the eternal conflict between youth and crabbed age was merely being repeated—with the addition in this particular instance of unusual complications.

For an hour or more the perplexed pair threshed away, striving to winnow the chaff from the pure grain in Aunt Sharley's nature, and the upshot was that Emmy Lou had a

headache and Mildred had a little spell of crying, and they agreed that never had there been such a paradox of part saint and part sinner, part black ogre and part black angel, as their Auntie was, created into a troubled world, and that something should be done to remedy the evil, provided it could be done without grievously hurting the old woman's feelings; but just what this something which should be done might be neither of them could decide, and so they went to bed and to sleep.

And the next day was another day exactly similar in its petty annoyances to the day before.

But a day was to come before the summer ended when a way out was found. The person who found the way out—or thought he did—was Mr. Harvey Winslow, the hero or villain of the hammock episode previously described in this narrative. He did not venture, though, to suggest a definite course of action until after a certain moonlit, fragrant night, when two happy young people agreed that thereafter these twain should be one.

Mildred knew already what was impending in the romance of Emmy Lou. So perhaps did Aunt Sharley. Her rheumatism had not affected her eyesight and she had all her faculties. All the same, it was to Aunt Sharley that Emmy Lou went next morning to tell of the choice she had made. There was no one whose consent had actually to be obtained. Both

the girls were of age; as their own master they enjoyed the use and control of their cosy little inheritance. Except for an aunt who lived in New Orleans and some cousins scattered over the West, they were without kindred. The Dabneys had been an old family, but not a large one. Nevertheless, in obedience to a feeling that told her Aunt Sharley should be the first, next only to her sister, to share with her the happiness that had come into her life, Emmy Lou sought out the old woman before breakfast time.

Seemingly Aunt Sharley approved. For if at the moment she mumbled out a complaint about chillens too young to know their own minds being prone to fly off with the first young w'ite gen'l'man that came along frum nobody knowed whar, still there was nothing begrudged or forced about the vocal jubilations with which she made the house ring during the succeeding week. At prayer meeting on Wednesday night at Zion Coloured Baptist Church and at lodge meeting on Friday night she bore herself with an air of triumphant haughtiness which sorely irked her fellow members. It was agreed privily that Sis' Charlotte Helm got mo' and mo' bigotty, and not alone that, but mo' and mo' uppety, ever' day she lived.

If young Mr. Winslow had been, indirectly, the cause for her prideful deportment before her own colour, it was likewise Mr. Winslow who shortly was to be the instrument for humbling

her into the dust. Now this same Mr. Winslow, it should be stated, was a masterful young man. Only an abiding sense of humour kept him sometimes from being domineering. Along with divers other qualities it had taken masterfulness for him at twenty-nine to be superintendent of our street-railway system, now owned and operated by Northern capitalists. Likewise it had taken masterfulness for him to distance the field of Emmy Lou's local admirers within the space of five short months after he procured his transfer to our town from another town where his company likewise had traction interests. He showed the same trait in the stand he presently took with regard to the future status of Aunt Sharley in the household of which he was to become a member and of which he meant to be the head.

For moral support—which she very seriously felt she needed—Emmy Lou took her sister with her on the afternoon when she invaded the kitchen to break the news to Aunt Sharley. The girls came upon the old woman in one of her busiest moments. She was elbows deep in a white mass which in due time would become a batch of the hot biscuits of perfection. "Auntie," began Emmy Lou in a voice which she tried to make matter-of-fact, "we've—I've something I want to say to you."

"Ise lissenin', chile," stated the old woman shortly.

"It's this way, Auntie: We think—I mean

we're afraid that you're getting along so in life—getting so old that we——"

"Who say Ise gittin' ole?" demanded Aunt Sharley, and she jerked her hands out of the dough she was kneading.

"We both think so—I mean we all think so," corrected Emmy Lou.

"Who do you mean by we all? Does you mean dat young Mistah Winslow, Esquire, late of de North?" Her blazing eyes darted from the face of one sister to the face of the other, reading their looks. "Uh-huh!" she snorted. "I mout 'a' knowed he'd be de ver' one to come puttin' sech notions ez dem in you chillens' haids. Well, ma'am, an' whut, pray, do he want?" Her words fairly dripped with sarcasm.

"He thinks—in fact we all three do—that because you are getting along in years—you know you are, Auntie—and because your rheumatism bothers you so much at times that—that—well, perhaps that we should make a change in the running of the house. So—so——" She hesitated, then broke off altogether, anxious though she was to make an end to what she foresaw must be a painful scene for all three of them. Poor Emmy Lou was finding this job which she had nerved herself to carry through a desperately hard job. And Aunt Sharley's attitude was not making it any easier for her either.

"'So' whut?" snapped Aunt Sharley; then

answered herself: "An' so de wind blow frum dat quarter, do hit? De young gen'l'man ain't j'ined de fambly yit an' already he's settin' hisse'f to run it. All right den. Go on, chile—quit mumblin' up yore words an' please go on an' tell me whut you got to say! But ef you's fixin' to bring up de subjec' of my lettin' ary one of dese yere young flighty-haided, flibbertigibbeted, free-issue nigger gals come to work on dis place, you mout ez well save yore breath now an' yereafter, 'ca'se so long ez Ise able to drag one foot behine t'other I p'intedly does aim to manage dis yere kitchen."

"It isn't that—exactly," blurted out Emmy Lou. "You see, Auntie," she went on desperately, "we've decided, Harvey and I, that after our marriage we'll live here. We couldn't leave Mildred alone, and until she gets married this is going to be home for us all. And so we're afraid—with one more coming into the household and everything—that the added work is going to be too heavy for you to undertake. So we've decided that—that perhaps it would be better all round if you—if we—if you——"

"Go on, chile; say it, whutever it is."

"——that perhaps it would be better if you left here altogether and went to live in that nice little house that papa left you in his will."

Perhaps they did not see the stricken look that came into the eyes of the old negress or else she hid the look behind the fit of rage that

instantly possessed her. Perhaps they mistook the grey pallor that overspread the old face, turning it to an ashen colour, for the hue of temper.

"Do it all mean, den, dat after all dese yeahs you's tryin' to git shet of me—tryin' to t'row me aside lak an' ole worn-out broom? Well, I ain't gwine go!" Her voice soared shrilly to match the heights of her tantrum.

"Your wages will go on just the same—Harvey insists on that as much as we do," Emmy Lou essayed. "Don't you see, Auntie, that your life will be easier? You will have your own little home and your own little garden. You can come to see us—come every day if you want to. We'll come to see you. Things between us will go on almost exactly the same as they do now. You know how much we love you—Mildred and I. You know we are trying to think of your comfort, don't you?"

"Of course you do, Aunt Sharley," Mildred put in. "It isn't as if you were going clear out of our lives or we out of yours. You'll be ever so much happier."

"Well, I jes' ain't gwine go nary step." The defiant voice had become a passionate shriek. "Think Ise gwine leave yere an' go live in dat little house down dere by dem noisy tracks whar all dem odds an' ends of pore w'ite trash lives—dem scourin's an' sweepin's whut come yere to wuk in de new cotton mill! Think Ise gwine be corntent to wuk in a gyarden whilst

I knows Ise needed right yere to run dis place de way which it should be run! Think Ise gwine set quiet whilst Ise pulled up by de roots an' transported 'way frum de house whar Ise spend purty nigh de whole of my endurin' life! Well, I won't go—I won't never go! I won't go—'ca'se I jes' can't!" And then, to the intense distress of the girls, Aunt Sharley slumped into a chair, threw her floury hands over her face and with the big tears trickling out between her fingers she moaned over and over again between her gulping breaths:

"Oh, dat I should live to see de day w'en my own chillens wants to drive me away frum 'em! Oh, dat I should live to see dis day!"

Neither of them had ever seen Aunt Sharley weep like this—shaken as she was with great sobs, her head bowed almost to her knees, her bared arms quivering in a very palsy. They tried to comfort her, tried to put their arms about her, both of them crying too. At the touch of their arms stealing about her hunched shoulders she straightened, showing a spark of the spirit with which they were more familiar. She wrenched her body free of them and pointed a tremulous finger at the door. The two sisters stole out, feeling terribly guilty and thoroughly miserable.

It was not the Aunt Sharley they knew who waited upon them that dusk at supper. Rather it was her ghost—a ghost with a black mask of tragedy for a face, with eyes swollen and red-

dened, with lips which shook in occasional spasms of pain, though their owner strove to keep them firm. With their own faces tear-streaked and with lumps in their throats the girls kept their heads averted, as though they had been caught doing something very wrong, and made poor pretense of eating the dishes that the old woman placed before them. Such glances as they stole at her were sidelong covert glances, but they marked plainly enough how her shoulders drooped and how she dragged herself about the table.

Within a space of time to be measured by hours and almost by minutes she seemed to have aged years.

It was a mute meal and a most unhappy one for the sisters. More than once Aunt Sharley seemed on the point of saying something, but she, too, held her tongue until they had risen up from their places. From within the passage-way leading to the rear porch she spoke then across the threshold of the door at the back end of the dining room.

"You, nur nobody else, can't turn me out of dis house," she warned them, and in her words was the dead weight of finality. "An' ef you does, I ain't gwine leave de premises. Ise gwine camp right dere on de sidewalk an' dere I means to stay twell de policemens teks me up fur a vagrom. De shame of it won't be no greater fur me 'n 'tis fur you. Dat's all!" And with that she was gone before they could

answer, if indeed they had any answer to make.

It was the next day that the *Daily Evening News* announced the engagement and the date of the marriage, which would follow within four weeks. Congratulations in number were bestowed upon Emmy Lou; they came by telephone and in letters from former schoolmates, but mainly they came by word of mouth from townspeople who trooped in to say the things which people always say on such occasions—such things, for example, as that young Mr. Winslow should count himself a lucky man and that Emmy Lou would make a lovely bride; that he should be the proudest young man in the Union and she the happiest girl in the state, and all the rest of it. Under this outpouring of kindly words from kindly folk the recipient was radiant enough to all appearances, which was a tribute to her powers as an actress. Beneath the streams of her happiness coursed sombre undercurrents of distress and perplexity, roiling the waters of her joy and her pride.

For nearly a week, with no outsider becoming privy to the facts, she endured a situation which daily was marked by harassing experiences and which hourly became more intolerable. Then, in despair, seeing no way out at all, she went to a certain old white house out on Clay Street to confide in one to whom many another had turned, seeking counsel in

the time of trouble. She went to see Judge William Pitman Priest, and she went alone, telling no one, not even Mildred, of the errand upon which she was bound.

The wide front porch was empty where the old Judge spent most of his leisure hours when the weather suited, and knowing as she did the custom of the house, and being, for a fact, almost as much at home beneath its roof as beneath her own, Emmy Lou, without knocking, walked into the hall and turning to the right entered the big sitting room. Its lone occupant sat up with a jerk, wiping the drowsiness out of his eyes with the back of his hand. He had been taking a cat nap on his ancient sofa; his long white back hair was tousled up comically behind his bald pink brow.

"Why, hello, honey!" he said heartily, rising to his feet and bowing with a quaint ceremonial gesture that contrasted with and yet somehow matched the homeliness of his greeting. "You slipped in so quiet on them dainty little feet of yours I never heared you comin' a-tall." He took her small hands in his broad pudgy ones, holding her off at arm's length. "And don't you look purty! Mighty nigh any woman looks cool and sweet when she's got on white fixin's, but when a girl like you puts 'em on—well, child, there ain't no use talkin', you shorely are a sight to cure sore eyes. And you git to favour your sweet mother more and more every day you live.

I can't pay you no higher compliment than that. Set down in that cheer yonder, where I kin look at you whilst we visit."

"I'd rather sit here by you, sir, on the sofa, if you don't mind," she said.

"Suit yourself, honey."

She settled herself upon the sofa and he let his bulky frame down alongside her, taking one of her hands into his. Her free hand played with one of the big buttons on the front of her starched linen skirt and she looked, not at him, but at the shining disk of pearl, as he said:

"Well, Emmy Lou, whut brings you 'way out here to my house in the heat of the day?"

She turned her face full upon him then and he saw the brooding in her eyes and gave her hand a sympathetic little squeeze.

"Judge," she told him, "you went to so much trouble on my account and Mildred's when we were still minors that I hate to come now worrying you with my affairs. But somehow I felt that you were the one for me to turn to."

"Emmy Lou," he said very gravely, "your father was one of the best men that ever lived and one of the best friends ever I had on this earth. And no dearer woman than your mother ever drawed the breath of life. It was a mighty proud day fur me and fur Lew Lake when he named us two as the guardians of his children, and it was a pleasure to both of us to help look to your interests after he was took from us.

Why, when your mother went too, I'd a' liked the best in the world to have adopted you two children outright." He chuckled a soft little chuckle. "I reckin I would have made the effort, too, only it seemed like that old nigger woman of yours appeared to have prior rights in the matter, and knowin' her disposition I was kind of skeered to advance the suggestion."

"It was about Aunt Sharley that I came to see you to-day, Judge Priest."

"That so? I had a visit from her here the other day."

"What other day?" she asked, startled.

"Oh, it must have been a matter of three weeks ago—fully. Shall I tell you whut she come to see me about? You'll laugh when you hear it. It tickled me right smartly at the time. She wanted to know what I knew about this here young Mr. Winslow—yes, that was it. She said all the visible signs p'inted to a serious affair 'twixt you two young people, and she said before it went any further she wanted to know ef he was the kind of a young man to be gittin' hisself engaged to a member of the Dabney family, and she wanted to know ef his folks were the real quality folks and not this here codfish aristocracy: That was the very term she used—'codfish aristocracy.' Well, I was able to reasshore her. You see, honey, I'd took it on myself to do a little inquirin' round about Mr. Winslow on my own responsibility—not that I wanted to be pryin' into

your business and not because I aimed to be tryin' to come between you and the young man ef I wasn't altogether satisfied with the accounts I got of him, but because I loved you and wanted to make sure in my own mind that Tom Dabney's child wasn't makin' the wrong choice. You understand, don't you? You see, ez fur back ez a month and a half ago, or mebbe even further back than that, I was kind of given to understand that you and this young man were gittin' deeply interested in each other."

"Why, how could you?" inquired Emmy Lou. "We weren't even engaged then. Who could have circulated such a report about us?"

"The very first time I seen you two young folks walkin' up Franklin Street together you both were circulatin' it," he said, chuckling again. "You may not 'a' knowed it, but you were. I may be gittin' old, but my eyesight ain't entirely failed up on me yit—I could read the signs when I was still half a block away frum you. It was right after that that I started my own little private investigation. So you see I was qualified to reasshore Aunt Sharley. I told her all the available information on the subject proved the young gentleman in question was not only a mighty clever, upstandin', manly young feller, but that where he hailed from he belonged to the quality folks, which really was the p'int she seemed most anxious about. That's whut I told her, and I

was monstrous glad to be able to tell her. A stranger might have thought it was pure impudence on her part, but of course we both know, you and me, whut was in the back part of her old kinky head. And when I'd got done tellin' her she went down the street from here with her head throwed away back, singin' till you could 'a' heard her half a mile off, I reckin."

"I never guessed it. She never told me she'd been to see you. And you didn't tell me, either, when you came the other night to wish me joy, Judge."

"I kind of figgered she wanted the matter treated confidential," explained Judge Priest. "So I respected whut I took to be her wishes in the matter. But wasn't it fur all the world jest like that old black woman?"

"Yes, it was just like her," agreed Emmy Lou, her face shadowed with deepening distress. "And because it was just like her and because I know now better than ever before how much she really loves me, those things make it all the harder to tell you what I came here to tell you—make it all the harder for me to decide what I should do and to ask your advice before I do decide."

"Oh, I reckin it can't be so serious ez all that," said Judge Priest comfortingly. "Betwixt us we oughter be able to find a way out of the difficulty, whutever it is. S'pose, honey, you start in at the beginnin' and give me all the facts in the matter that's worryin' you."

She started then and, though her voice broke several times, she kept on until she came to the end of her tragic little recital. To Emmy Lou it was very tragic indeed.

"So you see, Judge Priest, just how it is," she stated at the conclusion. "From both sides I am catching the brunt of the whole thing. Aunt Sharley won't budge an inch from the attitude she's taken, and neither will Harvey budge an inch. He says she must go; she tells me every day she won't go. This has been going on for a week now and I'm almost distracted. At what should be the happiest time in a girl's life I'm being made terribly unhappy. Why, it breaks my heart every time I look at her. I know how much we owe her—I know I can never hope to repay her for all she has done for me and my sister.

"But oh, Judge, I do want to be the right kind of wife to Harvey. All my life long I mean to obey him and to look up to him; I don't want to begin now by disobeying him—by going counter to his wishes. And I can understand his position too. To him she's just an unreasonable, meddlesome, officious, contrary old negro woman who would insist on running the household of which he should be the head. She would too.

"It isn't that he feels unkindly toward her—he's too good and too generous for that. Why, it was Harvey who suggested that wages should go on just the same after she leaves us—he has

even offered to double them if it will make her any better satisfied with the move. I'm sure, though, it can't be the question of money that figures with her. She never tells anyone about her own private affairs, but after all these years she must have a nice little sum saved up. I can't remember when she spent anything on herself—she was always so thrifty about money. At least she was careful about our expenditures, and of course she must have been about her own. So it can't be that. Harvey puts it down to plain stubbornness. He says after the first wrench of the separation is over she ought to be happier, when she's taking things easy in her own little house, than she is now, trying to do all the work in our house. He says he wants several servants in our home—a butler, and a maid to wait on me and Mildred, and a housemaid and a cook. He says we can't have them if we keep Aunt Sharley. And we can't, either—she'd drive them off the place. No darky could get along with her a week. Oh, I just don't know what to do!"

"And whut does Aunt Sharley say?" asked the Judge.

"I told you. Sometimes she says she won't go and sometimes she says she can't go. But she won't tell why she can't—just keeps on declaring up and down that she can't. She makes a different excuse or she gives a different reason every morning; she seems to spend her nights thinking them up. Sometimes I think

she is keeping something back from me—that she isn't telling me the real cause for her refusal to accept the situation and make the best of it. You know how secretive our coloured people can be sometimes."

"All the time, you mean," amended the old man. "Northerners never seem to be able to git it through their heads that a darky kin be loud-mouthed and close-mouthed at the same time. Now you take that black boy Jeff of mine. Jeff knows more about me—my habits, my likes and my dislikes, my private business and my private thoughts and all—than I know myself. And I know jest egsactly ez much about his real self—whut he thinks and whut he does behind my back—ez he wants me to know, no more and no less. I judge it's much the same way with your Aunt Sharley, and with all the rest of their race too. We understand how to live with 'em, but that ain't sayin' we understand how they live."

He looked steadfastly at his late ward.

"Honey, when you come to cast up the account you do owe a lot to that old nigger woman, don't you?—you and your sister both. Mebbe you owe even more than you think you do. There ain't many left like her in this new generation of darkies that's growed up—she belongs to a species that's mighty nigh extinct, ez you might say. Us Southern people are powerfully given, some of us, to tellin' whut we've done fur the black race—and we have

done a lot, I'll admit—but sometimes I think we're prone to furgit some of the things they've done fur us. Hold on, honey," he added hastily, seeing that she was about to speak in her own defence. "I ain't takin' issue with you aginst you nor yit aginst the young man you're fixin' to marry. After all, you've got your own lives to live. I was jest sort of studyin' out loud—not offerin' an argument in opposition."

Still looking straight at her he asked a question:

"Tell me one thing, Emmy Lou, jest to satisfy my curiosity and before we go any further with this here bothersome affair that's makin' you unhappy. It seems like to me I heared somewheres that you first met this young man of yours whilst you and little Mildred were off at Knollwood Seminary finishin' your educations. Is that so or ain't it?"

"Yes, sir, that's true," she answered. "You see, when we first went to Knollwood, Harvey had just been sent South to take a place in the office of the trolley road at Knollwood.

"His people were interested in the line; he was assistant to the general manager then. I met him there. And he—he was interested in me, I suppose, and afterward, when he had worked his way up and had been promoted to the superintendency, his company bought our line in, too, and he induced them to transfer

him here—I mean to say he was transferred here. So that's how it all happened."

"I see," he said musingly. "You met him down there and he got interested—'interested' was the word you used, wasn't it, honey?—and then after a spell when you had left there he followed you here—or rather it jest so happened by a coincidence that he was sent here. Well, I don't know ez I blame him—for being interested, I mean. It strikes me that in addition to bein' an enterprisin' young man he's also got excellent taste and fine discrimination. He ought to go quite a ways in the world—whut with coincidences favourin' him and everything."

The whimsical note died out of his voice. His tone became serious.

"Child," he said gently, "whut would you say—and whut's even more important, whut would you do—ef I was to tell you that ef it hadn't a-been fur old Aunt Sharley this great thing that's come into your life probably never would have come into it? What ef I was to tell you that if it hadn't a-been fur her you never would have knowed Mr. Harvey Winslow in the first place—and natchelly wouldn't be engaged to marry him now?"

"Why, Judge Priest, how could that be?" Her widened eyes betokened a blank incredulity.

"Emmy Lou," he answered slowly, "in tellin' you whut I'm about to tell you I'm breakin' a solemn pledge, and that's a thing I ain't much

given to doin'. But this time I figger the circumstances justify me. Now listen: You remember, don't you, that in the first year or two following after the time your mother left us, the estate was sort of snarled up? Well, it was worse snarled up than you two children had any idea of. Two or three of the heaviest investments your father made in the later years of his life weren't turnin' out very well. The taxes on 'em amounted to mighty nigh ez much ez whut the income frum 'em did. We didn't aim to pester you two girls with all the details, so we sort of kept 'em to ourselves and done the best we could. You lived simple and there was enough to take care of you and to keep up your home, and we knowed we could depend on Aunt Sharley to manage careful. Really, she knowed more about the true condition of things than you did. Still, even so, you no doubt got an inklin' sometimes of how things stood with regards to your finances."

She nodded, saying nothing, and he went on:

"Well, jest about that time, one day in the early part of the summer I had a visit frum Aunt Sharley. She come to me in my office down at the courthouse, and I sent Jeff to fetch Lew Lake, and we both set down there together with that old nigger woman, and she told us whut she had to say. She told us that you children had growed up with the idea that you'd go off to boardin' school somewheres after you were done with our local schools, and that you

were beginnin' to talk about goin' and that it was high time fur you to be gittin' ready to go, and, in brief, she wanted to know whut about it? We told her jest how things stood—that under the terms of your father's will practically everything you owned was entailed—held in trust by us—until both of the heirs had come of age. We told her that, with your consent or without it, we didn't have the power to sell off any part of the estate, and so, that bein' the case, the necessary money to send you off to school jest natchelly couldn't be provided noways, and that, since there was jest barely enough money comin' in to run the home and, by stintin', to care fur you and Mildred, any outside and special expense comin' on top of the regular expenses couldn't possibly be considered—or, in other words, that you two couldn't hope to go to boardin' school.

"I reckin you kin guess fur yourself whut that old woman done then. She flared up and showed all her teeth. She said that the quality always sent their daughters off to boardin' school to give 'em the final polish that made fine ladies of 'em. She said her Ole Miss—meanin' your grandmother—had gone to Knollwood and that your mother had gone there, and that you two girls were goin' there, too, whether or no. We tried to explain to her that some of the finest young ladies in the land and some of the best-born ones never had the advantages of a college education, but she said she

didn't keer whut people somewheres else might do—that the daughters of her kind of quality folks went to college and that you two were goin', so that all through your lives you could hold up your heads with the finest in the land. You never seen anybody so set and determined about a thing ez that old woman was. We tried explainin' to her and we tried arguin' with her, and Lew Lake tried losin' his temper with her, him bein' somewhat hot-headed, but nothin' we could say seemed to have any effect on her at all. She jest set there with her old skinny arms folded on her breast like a major-general, and that old under lip of hers stuck out and her neck bowed, sayin' over and over agin that you girls were goin' to that boardin' school same ez the Dabneys and the Helms had always done. So finally we throwed up our hands and told her we were at the end of our rope and she'd kindly have to show us the way to bring it all about.

"And then she up and showed us. You remember the night me and Lew Lake come up to your house to talk over the matter of your college education and I told you to call Aunt Sharley into the conference—you remember that, don't you? And you remember she come out strong in favour of Knollwood and that after a while we seemed to give in? Well, child, I've got a little confession to make to you now along with a bigger one later on: That was all a little piece of by-play that had been planned out

in advance. We knowed beforehand that Aunt Sharley was goin' to favour Knollwood and that we were goin' to fall into line with her notions about it at the end. She'd already licked us to a standstill there in my office, and we were jest tryin' to save our faces.

"So you went to college and you both stayed there two full years. And I mout ez well tell you right now that the principal reason why you had so many purty fixin's to wear whilst you was away and why you had ez much pin money to spend ez any other two girls there was because that old woman lived on less'n it would take, seemin'ly, to keep a bird alive, savin' every cent she could scrape up, and bringin' it to me to be sent on to you ez part of your allowance."

"But I don't understand yet," cried out Emmy Lou. "Why, Judge, Aunt Sharley just can write her own name. We had to print out the words in the letters we wrote her so that she could read them. I don't understand how the poor good old ignorant soul could figure out where the money which paid for our schooling could be found when both you and Doctor Lake——"

"I'm comin' to that part now," he told her. "Honey, you were right when you guessed that Aunt Sharley has been holdin' somethin' back frum you durin' this past week; but she's been tellin' you the truth too—in a way of speakin'. She ain't got any money saved up—or at least

ef she's got any at all it ain't ez much ez you imagine. Whut she's got laid by kin only represent the savin's of four or five years, not of a whole lifetime. And when she said to you that she couldn't leave you to go to live in that little house that your father left her in his will she wasn't speakin' a lie. She can't go there to live because it ain't hers—she don't own it any more. Over five years ago she sold it outright, and she took the price she got fur it and to that price she added whut she'd saved up ez the fruits of a life-time of toil spent in your service and the service of your people before you, and that was the money—her money, every cent of it—which paid fur your two years at college. Now you know."

For a long half minute she stared at him, her face whitening and the great tears beginning to run down her cheeks. They ran faster and faster. She gave a great sob and then she threw her arms about the old Judge's neck and buried her face on his shoulder.

"Oh, I never dreamed it! I never dreamed it! I never had a suspicion! And I've been so cruel to her, so heartless! Oh, Judge Priest, why did you and Doctor Lake ever let her do it? Why did you let her make that sacrifice?"

He patted her shoulder gently.

"Well, honey, we did try at first to discourage her from the notion, but we mighty soon seen it wasn't any use to try, and a little later on, comin' to think it over, we decided mebbe we

didn't want to try any more. There're some impulses in this world too noble to be interfered with or hampered or thwarted, and some sacrifices so fine that none of us should try to spoil 'em by settin' up ourselves and our own wills in the road. That's how I felt. That's how Lew Lake felt. That's how we both felt. And anyhow she kept p'intin' out that she wouldn' never need that there little house, because so long ez she lived she'd have a home with you two girls. That's whut she said, anyway."

"But why weren't we allowed to know before now? Why didn't we know—Mildred and I—ten days ago, so that she might have been spared the cruel thing I've done? Why didn't she come out and tell us when we went to her and I told her she must get off the place? Why didn't you tell me, Judge, before now—why didn't you give me a hint before now?"

"Honey, I couldn't. I was under a solemn promise not to tell—a promise that I've jest now broken. On the whole I think I'm glad I did break it. . . . Lemme see ef I kin remember in her own words whut she said to us? 'Gen'l'mens,' she says, 'dem chillens is of de quality an' entitled to hole up they haids wid de fines' in de land. I don't want never to have dem demeaned by lettin' dem know or by lettin' ary other pusson know dat an old black nigger woman furnished de money to help mek fine young ladies of 'em. So long ez I live,' she says, 'dey ain't never to heah it frum my

lips an' you must both gimme yore word dat dey don't never heah it frum yourn. W'en I dies, an' not befo' den, dey may know de truth. De day dey lays me in de coffin you kin tell 'em both de secret—but not befo'!' she says.

"So you see, child, we were under a pledge, and till to-day I've kept that pledge. Nobody knows about the sale of that little piece of property except Aunt Sharley and Lew Lake and me and the man who bought it and the man who recorded the deed that I drew up. Even the man who bought it never learned the real name of the previous owner, and the matter of the recordin' was never made public. Whut's the good of my bein' the circuit judge of this district without I've got influence enough with the county clerk to see that a small real-estate transaction kin be kept frum pryin' eyes? So you see only five people knowed anything a-tall about that sale, and only three of them knowed the true facts, and now I've told you, and so that makes four that are sharin' the secret. . . . Don't carry on so, honey. 'Tain't ez ef you'd done somethin' that couldn't be mended. You've got all your life to make it up to her. And besides, you were in ignorance until jest now. . . . Now, Emmy Lou, I ain't goin' to advise you; but I certainly would like to hear frum your own lips whut you do aim to do?"

She raised her head and through the brimming tears her eyes shone like twin stars.

"What am I going to do?" she echoed. "Judge, you just said nobody knew except four of us. Well, everybody is going to know—everybody in this town is going to know, because I'm going to tell them. I'll be a prouder and a happier girl when they do know, all of them, than I've ever been in my whole life. And I warn you that neither you nor Aunt Sharley nor any other person alive can keep me from telling them. I'm going to glory in telling the world the story of it."

"Lord bless your spunky little soul, honey, I ain't goin' to try to hender you frum tellin'," said Judge Priest. "Anyhow, I expect to be kept busy durin' the next few days keepin' out of that old nigger woman's way. . . . So that's the very first thing you aim to do?"

"No, it isn't, either," she exclaimed, catching the drift of his meaning. "That is going to be the second thing I do. But the first thing I am going to do is to go straight back home as fast as I can walk and get down on my knees before Aunt Sharley and beg her forgiveness for being so unjust and so unkind."

"Oh, I reckin that won't hardly be necessary," said Judge Priest. "I kind of figger that ef you'll jest have a little cryin' bee with her that'll answer every purpose. Jest put your young arms round her old neck and cry a spell with her. It's been my observation that, black or white, cryin' together seems to bring a heap of comfort to the members of your sex."

"I think perhaps I shall try that," she agreed, smiling in spite of herself; and her smile was like sunshine in the midst of a shower. "I'll begin by kissing her right smack on the mouth—like this." And she kissed the Judge squarely on his.

"Judge Priest," she stated, "this town is due for more than one surprise. Do you know who's going to be the matron of honour at my wedding three weeks from now? I'll give you just one guess."

He glanced up at her quizzically.

"Whut do you s'pose the young man is goin' to have to say about that?" he asked.

"If he doesn't like it he can find some other girl to marry him," she said.

"Oh, I kind of imagine he'll listen to reason—especially comin' frum you," said Judge Priest. "He will ef he's the kind of young man that's worthy to marry Tom Dabney's daughter."

It is possible that some of the bridegroom's kinspeople, coming down from the North for the wedding, were shocked to find a wizen, coal-black woman, who was lame of one leg, not only taking part in the ceremony, filling a place next in importance to that of the contracting pair and the maid of honour, but apparently in active and undisputed charge of the principal details. However, being well-bred persons, they did not betray their astonishment by word, look or deed. Perhaps they

figured it as one of the customs of the country that an old shrill-voiced negress, smelling of snuff and black silk, should play so prominent a rôle in the event itself and in the reception that followed.

However, all that is ancient history now. What I have to add is a commingling of past local history and present local history. As I said at the outset, there were formerly any number of black children in our town who bore the names of white friends and white patrons, but to my knowledge there was never but one white child named for a black person. The child thus distinguished was a girl child, the first-born of Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Winslow. Her full name was Charlotte Helm Winslow, but nearly everybody called her Little Sharley. She is still called so, I believe, though growing now into quite a sizable young person.

CHAPTER VI

JOHN J. COINCIDENCE

SOMEBODY said once that facts are stubborn things, which is a lie. Facts are almost the most flexible things known to man. The historian appreciates the truth of this just as the fictionist recognises and is governed by the opposite of it, each according to his lights. In recording the actual, the authentic, the definite, your chronicler may set down in all soberness things which are utterly inconceivable; may set them down because they have happened. But he who deals with the fanciful must be infinitely more conventional in his treatment of the probabilities and the possibilities, else the critics will say he has let his imagination run away with him. They'll tell him to put ice on his brow and advise sending his creative faculty to the restcure.

Jules Verne was a teller of most mad tales which he conjured up out of his head. The Brothers Wright and Edison and Holland, the submarine man, worked out their notions with

monkey wrenches and screw drivers and things, thereby accomplishing verities far surpassing the limit where common sense threw up a barrier across the pathway of Verne's genius. H. G. Wells never dreamed a dream of a world war to equal the one which William Hohenzollern loosed by ordering a flunky in uniform to transmit certain dispatches back yonder in the last week of July and the first week of August, 1914.

So always it has gone. So always, beyond peradventure, it must continue to go.

If in his first act the playwright has his principal characters assembled in a hotel lobby in Chicago and in Act II has them all bumping into one another—quite by chance—in a dugout in Flanders, the reviewers sternly will chide him for violating Rule 1 of the book of dramatic plausibilities, and quite right they will be too. But when the identical event comes to pass in real life—as before now it has—we merely say that, after all, it's a small world now, isn't it? And so saying, pass along to the next preposterous occurrence that has just occurred. In fiction coincidence has its metes and bounds beyond which it dare not step. In human affairs it has none.

Speaking of coincidences, that brings me round to the matter of a certain sergeant and a certain private in our American Expeditionary Force which is a case that is a case in point of what I have just been saying upon this subject.

If Old Man Coincidence had not butted into the picture when he did and where he did and so frequently as he did, there would be—for me—no tale to tell touching on these two, the sergeant and the private. But he did. And I shall.

To begin at the remote beginning, there once upon a time was a fight in front of the public school in Henry Street over on the East Side, in which encounter one Pasquale Gallino licked the Semitic stuffings out of a fellow-pupil of his—by name Hyman Ginsburg. To be explicit about it, he made the Ginsburg boy's somewhat prominent nose to bleed extensively and swelled up Hyman's ear until for days thereafter Hyman's head, viewed fore or aft, had rather a lop-sided appearance, what with one ear being so much thicker than its mate. The object of this mishandlement was as good as whipped before he started by reason of the longer reach and quicker fist play of his squat and swarthy opponent. Nevertheless, facing inevitable and painful defeat, he acquitted himself with proper credit and courage.

Bearing his honourable wounds, Master Ginsburg went home from battle to a tenement in Allen Street, there to be licked again for having been licked before; or, speaking with exactitude, for having been in a fight, his father being one who held by the theory that diplomacy ever should find the way out to peace when blows threatened to follow on disputation.

With view, therefore, to proving his profound distaste for physical violence in any form he employed it freely upon the body of his son, using to that end a strap. Scarred in new places, the victim of two beatings in one day went weeping and supperless to bed.

Now this fight in Henry Street took place some sixteen years ago, and in sixteen years a great deal of water runs under the bridges provided for that purpose and for other purposes. Two separate currents of the water that flowed caught up Hyman Ginsburg and Pasquale Gallino and carried them along differing channels toward differing destinies. While Hyman was in the grammar grades, a brag pupil, Pasquale was in the Protectory, a branded incorrigible. While Hyman was attending high school, Pasquale was attending reform school. When Hyman, a man grown, was taking his examinations with the idea of getting on the police force, Pasquale was constructing an alibi with the idea of staying out of Sing Sing. One achieved his present ambition—that was Hyman.

The next period of their respective developments found this pair in a fair way each to achieve a definite niche in his chosen profession. Patrolman Hyman Ginsburg, after walking post for some months, had been taken out of uniform and put into civilian garb as a plain-clothes man on the Headquarters staff. Here he was making good. Having intelligence and

energy and the racial persistence which is as much a part of his breed as their hands and their feet are, he was looked upon in the department as a detective with a future ahead of him.

As for him who had once been Pasquale Gallino, he now occupied a position of prominence amid congenial surroundings while following after equally congenial pursuits. There was a gang. Despite the fact that it was such a new gang, this gang before the eyes of law and order stood high upon a pinnacle of evil eminence, overtopping such old-established gangs as the Gas House and the Gophers, the Skinned Rabbits and the Pearl Button Kid's. Taking title from the current name of its chieftain, it was popularly known as the Stretchy Gorman gang. Its headquarters was a boozing den of exceeding ill repute on the lower West Side. Its chief specialties were loft robberies and dock robberies. Its favourite side lines were election frauds and so-called strike-breaking jobs. The main amusement of its members was hoodlumism in its broader and more general phases. Its shield and its buckler was political influence of a sort; its keenest sword was its audacious young captain. You might call it a general-purposes gang. Contemporary gangsters spoke of it with respect and admiration. For a thing so young it gave great promise.

A day came, though, when the protection under which the Stretchy Gormans had

flourished ceased to protect. It is not known, nor yet is it written, what the reason for this was. Perhaps there was a breaking off of the friendly relations theretofore existing between one of the down-town district leaders and one of the powers—name deleted—higher up. Perhaps the newspapers had scolded too shrilly, demanding the house-cleaning of a neighbourhood which had become a bad smell in the sensitive nostrils of honest taxpayers and valued advertisers. Certainly burglaries in the wholesale silk district had occurred so numerously as to constitute a public scandal.

Then, besides, there was the incident of the night watchman of a North River freight pier, a worthy enough person though a nonvoter and therefore of small account from the viewpoint of ward politics, who stood up in single-handed defence of his employer's premises and goods against odds of at least four to one. Swinging a cold chisel, someone chipped a bit of bone out of the watchman's skull as expeditiously and almost as neatly as a visiting Englishman chips the poll of his breakfast egg; so that forever after the victim nursed an achesome and slightly addled brain. Then there were other things.

Be the cause what it may, it certainly is the fact that on a pleasant autumnal afternoon Inspector Krogan summoned to his presence two members of the Central Office staff and told them to go get Stretchy Gorman. Stretchy was to be gone after and got on the blanket

charge—the rubber blanket charge, as one might say, since it is so elastic and covers such a multitude of sins—of being a suspicious character.

Now Stretchy Gorman had no character to speak of; so therein the accusation appeared faulty. But equally was it true as Holy Gospel that he was suspicious of nearly everybody on earth and that nearly everybody on earth had reasons to be suspicious of him. So, balancing one word against the other, the garment might be said to fit him. At any rate, it was plain the supreme potentates had decreed for him that he was to wear it.

One of the detectives detailed to this assignment was Hyman Ginsburg. His partner on the job was a somewhat older man named Casane. These two frequently worked together. Pulling in double harness they made a dependable team. Both had wit and shrewdness. By sight, Casane knew the individual they were deputed to take; Ginsburg, to his knowledge, had never seen him.

Across his roll-top desk the inspector, speaking as follows, according to the mode of the fellowcraft, gave them their instructions:

"You'll likely be findin' this here party at the Stuffed Owl. That's his regular hang-out. My information is that he's usually there regular this time of the day. I've just had word that he went in there fifteen minutes ago; it's likely he'll be stayin' a while.

"Now, if he's in there don't you two go and send for him to come outside to you; nothin' like that. See? You go right in after him and nail him right in front of his own pals. Understand? I want him and his bunch and the reporters all to know that this here alleged drag of his that the newspapers've been beefin' so loud about is all bogus. And then you fetch him here to me and I'll do the rest. Don't make no gun play nor nothin' of that nature without you have to, but at the same time and nevertheless don't take no foolish chances. This party may act up rough and then again he may not. Get me? My guess is he won't. Still and notwithstandin', don't leave no openin's. Now get goin'."

Sure enough it was at the sign of the Stuffed Owl, down in a basement bat cave of a place and in the dusk of the evening, that they found their man. To Ginsburg's curious eyes he revealed himself as a short, swart person with enormously broad shoulders and with a chimpanzee's arm reach. Look at those arms of his and one knew why he was called Stretchy. How he had acquired his last name of Gorman was only to be guessed at. It was fair to assume, though, he had got it by processes of self-adoption—no unusual thing in a city where overnight a Finkelstein turns into a Fogarty and he who at the going down of the sun was Antonio Baccigaluppi has at the upcoming of the same become Joseph Brown. One thing, though, was sure

as rain: This particular Gorman had never been a Gorman born.

Not the blackest of the "Black Irish," not the most brunette of brunette Welshmen ever had a skin of that peculiar brownish pallor, like clear water in a cypress swamp, or eyes like the slitted pair looking out obliquely from this man's head.

Taking their cue of action from their superior's words, Casane and Ginsburg, having come down the short flight of steps leading from the sidewalk, went directly across the barroom to where their man sat at a small table with two others, presumably both of his following, for his companions.

The manner of the intruders was casual enough; casual and yet marked by a business-like air. They knew that at this moment they were not especially attractive risks for an accident insurance company. The very sawdust on the floor stank of villainy; the brass bar rail might have been a rigid length of poison snake; the spittoons were small sinks of corruption. Moreover, they had been commissioned to take a monarch off his throne before the eyes of his courtiers, and history records that this ever was a proceeding fraught with peril.

Still they went straight toward him. Before they spoke a word—almost before they were well inside the street door—he must have recognised them as Headquarters men. Being what he was, he instantly would have appraised

them for what they were had the meeting taken place in the dead vast and middle of Sahara's sandy wastes. Even the seasoned urbanite who is law-abiding and who has no cause to fear the thief-taker can pick out a detective halfway up the block.

Besides, in the same instant that they descended from the street level, the barkeeper with his tongue had made a small clucking sound, thrice repeated, and with all four fingers of his right hand had gripped the left lapel of his unbuttoned waistcoat. Thereat there had been a general raising of heads all over the place. Since the days of Jonathan Wild and even before that—since the days when the Romany Rye came out of the East into England—the signal of the collar has been the sign of the collar, which means the cop.

The man they sought eyed them contemptuously from under the down-tilted visor of his cap as they approached him. His arms were folded upon the table top and for the moment he kept them so.

"Evening," said Casane civilly, pausing alongside him. "Call yourself Gorman, don't you?"

"I've been known to answer to that name," he answered back in the curious flat tone that is affected by some of his sort and is natural with the rest of them. "Wot of it?"

"There's somebody wants to have a talk with you up at the front office—that's all," said Casane.

"It's a pinch then, huh?" The gangster put his open hands against the edge of the table as though for a rearward spring.

"I'm tellin' you all we know ourselves," countered Casane. His voice was conciliatory —soothing almost. But Ginsburg had edged round past Casane, ready at the next warning move to take the gang leader on the flank with a quick forward rush, and inside their overcoats the shapes of both the officers had tensed.

"Call it a pinch if you want to," went on Casane. "I'd call it more of an invitation just to take a little walk with us two and then have a chat with somebody else. Unless you or some of your friends here feel like startin' something there'll be no rough stuff—that's orders. We're askin' you to go along—first. How about it?"

"Oh, I'll go—I'll go! There's nobody got anything on me. And nobody's goin' to get anything on me neither."

He stood up and with a quick movement jerked back the skirts of his coat, holding them aloft so that his hip pockets and his waistband showed.

"Take notice!" he cried, invoking as witnesses all present. "Take notice that I'm carryin' no gat! So don't you bulls try framin' me under the Sullivan Law for havin' a gat on me. There's half a dozen here knows I ain't heeled and kin swear to it—case of a frame-up. Now go ahead and frisk me!"

"That'll be all right—we could easy take your word for it," said Casane, still maintaining his placating pose. Nevertheless he signed to Ginsburg and the latter moved a step nearer their man and his practiced fingers ran swiftly over the unresisting form, feeling beneath the arms, down the flanks, about the belt line and even at the back of the neck for a suspicious hard bulge inside the garments, finally giving the side coat pockets a perfunctory slap.

"Unless you make it necessary, we won't be callin' for the wagon," Casane stated. "Just the three of us'll take a little stroll, like I'm telling you—just stroll out and take the air up to Headquarters."

He slipped into position on one side of the gangster, Ginsburg on the other. Over his shoulder the man thus placed between them looked round to where his two underlings still sat at the table, both silent as the rest of the company were, but both plainly prepared for any contingencies; both ready to follow their chief's lead in whatsoever course, peaceable or violent, he might next elect to follow.

"Here you, Louie," he bade one of them, "jump to the telephone and notify a certain party to have me mouthpiece at Headquarters by the time I kin get there with these two dicks. Tell him the cops've got nothin' on me, but I wants me mouthpiece there just the same—case of a tie."

Until now the preliminaries had been carried

on with a due regard for the unwritten but rigid code of underworld etiquette. From neither side had there issued a single unethical word. The detectives had been punctilious to avoid ruffling the sensibilities of any and all. All the same, the prisoner chose of a sudden to turn nasty. It was at once manifest that he aimed to give offence without giving provocation or real excuse for reprisals on the part of the invaders. He spat sidewise across Casane's front and as he took the first step forward he brought the foot down upon one of Ginsburg's feet, grinding his heel sharply into the toes beneath. Ginsburg winced at the pain but did not speak; he had not spoken at all up until now, leaving it to Casane as the elder man to conduct the preliminaries.

"Why don't you say something, you Jew!" taunted the prisoner. "Don't you even know enough to excuse yourself when you stick your fat feet in people's way?"

"That'll be all right," said Ginsburg crisply. It was his business to avoid the issue of a clash. "And it'll be all right your calling me a Jew. I am a Jew and I'm proud of it. And I'm wearing the same name I started out with too."

"Is that so?"

Except in the inspired pages of fiction city thugs are singularly barren of power to deliver really snappy, really witty retorts.

"Is that so, Jew?" He stared at Ginsburg and a derisive grin opened a gap in his broad

dark face. "Oh, be chee! We ain't strangers —you and me ain't! We've met before—when we was kids. Down in Henry Street, it was. I put me mark on you oncet, and if I ever feel like it I'll do it again sometime."

Like a match under shavings the words kindled half-forgotten memories in the young detective's brain and now—for his part—recognition came flashing back out of the past.

"I thought so," he said, choosing to ignore the gangster and addressing Casane. "I thought from the first Gorman wasn't his right name. I've forgotten what his right name is, but it's nothing that sounds like Gorman. He's a wop. I went to the same school with him over on the East Side a good many years ago."

"Don't forget to tell him how the wop licked the Jew," broke in the prisoner. "Remember how the scrap started?"

He spat again and this time he did not miss. Ginsburg put up his gloved hand and wiped clean a face that with passion had turned a mottle of red-and-white blotches. His voice shook from the strain of his effort to control himself.

"I'll get you for that," he said quietly. "And I'll get you good. The day'll come when I'll walk you in broad daylight up to the big chief, and I'll have the goods on you too."

"Forget it," jeered the ruffian triumphantly. Before the eyes of his satellites he had—by his standards—acquitted himself right creditably.

"You got nothin' on me now, Jew, and you never will have. Well, come on, you bulls, let's be goin' along. I wouldn't want the neither one of you for steady company. One of you is too polite and the other'n too meek for my tastes."

The man who was called Stretchy Gorman spoke a prophetic word when he said the police had nothing on him. Since they had nothing on him, he was let go after forty-eight hours of detention; but that is not saying they did not intend, if they could—and in such cases they usually can—to get something on him.

No man in the department had better reason to crave that consummation than Hyman Ginsburg had. With him the hope of achieving revenge became practically an obsession. It rode in his thoughts. Any hour, in a campaign to harry the gangster to desperation by means of methods that are common enough inside the department, he might have invoked competent and willing assistance, for the word had filtered down from on high, where the seats of the mighty are, that those mysterious forces aloft would look complacently upon the eternal undoing of the Stretchy Gormans and their titular leader, no matter how accomplished.

But this notion did not match in with the colour of Ginsburg's desires. Single-handed, he meant to do the trick. Most probably then

the credit would be all his; assuredly the satisfaction would. When he considered this prospect his mind ran back along old grooves to the humiliating beating he had suffered in front of the Henry Street school so long before and of a most painful strapping that followed; these being coupled always with a later memory scar of a grievous insult endured in the line of duty and all the more hateful because it had been endured.

Once Ginsburg had read a book out of a public library—a book which mentally he called Less Miserables. Through the pages of that book there had walked a detective whom Ginsburg in his mind knew by the name of Jawbert. Now he recalled how this Jawbert spent his life tracking down an offender who was the main hero of the book. He told himself that in the matter of Stretchy Gorman he would be as another Jawbert.

By way of a beginning he took advantage of leisure hours to trace out the criminal history of his destined victim. In the gallery he found numbered and classified photographs; in the Bertillon bureau, finger prints; and in the records, what else he lacked of information—as an urchin, so many years spent in the protectory; as a youth, so many years in the reformatory; as a man, a year on Blackwell's Island for a misdemeanour and a three-year term at Sing Sing for a felony; also he dug up the entry of an indictment yet standing on

which trial had never been held for lack of proof to convict; finally a long list of arrests for this and that and the other thing, unproved. From under a succession of aliases he uncovered Gorman's real name.

But a sequence of events delayed his fuller assumption of the rôle of Jawbert. He was sent to Rio de Janeiro to bring back an absconder of note. Six months he worked on the famous Gonzales child-stealing mystery. He made two trips out to the Pacific Coast in connection with the Chappy Morgan wire-tapping cases. Few of the routine jobs about the detective bureau fell to him. He was too good for routine and his superiors recognised the fact and were governed thereby.

By the rules of tradition, Ginsburg—as a successful detective—should have been either an Irishman or of Irish descent. But in the second biggest police force in the world, wherein twenty per cent of the personnel wear names that betoken Jewish, Slavic or Latin forebears, tradition these times suffers many a body wallop.

On a night in early April, Ginsburg, coming across from New Jersey, landed off a ferryboat at Christopher Street. He had gone across the river to gather up a loose end of the evidence accumulating against Chappy Morgan, king of the wireless wire-tappers. It was nearly midnight when he emerged from the ferryhouse. In sight was no surface car; so he set out afoot

to walk across town to where he lived on the East Side.

Going through a side street in a district which mainly is given over to the establishments of textile jobbers, he observed, half a block away, a fire escape that bore strange fruit. The front line of a stretch of tallish buildings stood out in relief against the background of a wet moon and showed him, high up on the iron ladder which flighted down the face of one house of the row, two dark clumps, one placed just above the other.

Ginsburg slipped into a protecting ledge of shadow close up against the buildings and edged along nearer. The clumps resolved into the figures of men. One—the uppermost shape of a man—was receiving from some unseen sources flat burdens that came down over the roof coping and passing them along to the accomplice below. The latter in turn stacked them upon the grilled floor of the fire balcony that projected out into space at the level of the fourth floor, the building being five floors in height. By chance Ginsburg had happened upon a loft-robbing enterprise.

He shifted his revolver from his hip pocket to the side pocket of his overcoat and crept closer, planning for the pair so intently engaged overhead a surprise when they should descend with their loot. There was no time now to seek out the patrolman on the post; the job must be all his.

Two doors from the building that had been entered he crept noiselessly down into a basement and squatted behind an ash barrel. It was inky black in there; so inkily black he never suspected that the recess held another tenant. Your well-organised loft-robbing mob carries along a lookout who in case of discovery gives warning; in case of attack, repels the attack, and in case of pursuit acts as rear guard. In Stretchy Gorman's operations Stretchy acted as his own lookout, and a highly competent one he was, too, with a preference for lurking in areaways while his lieutenants carried forward the more arduous but less responsible shares of the undertaking.

In the darkness behind Ginsburg where he crouched a long gorilla's arm of an arm reached outward and downward, describing an arc. You might call it the long arm of coincidence and be making no mistake either. At the end of the arm was a fist and in the fist a length of gas pipe wrapped in rags. This gas pipe descended upon the back of Ginsburg's skull, crushing through the derby hat he wore. And the next thing Ginsburg knew he was in St. Vincent's Hospital with a splitting headache and the United States Government had gone to war against the German Empire.

Ginsburg did not volunteer. The parent who once had wielded the disciplinary strap-end so painstakingly had long since rejoined his bearded ancestors, but there was a depen-

dent mother to be cared for and a whole covey of younger brothers and sisters to be shepherded through school and into sustaining employment. So he waited for the draft, and when the draft took him and his number came out in the drawing, as it very soon did, he waived his exemptions and went to training camp wearing an old suit of clothes and an easy pair of shoes. Presently he found himself transferred to a volunteer outfit—one of the very few draft men who were to serve with that outfit.

In camp the discipline he had acquired and the drilling he had done in his prentice days on the force stood him in good stead. Hard work trimmed off of him the layers of tissue he had begun to take on; plain solid food finished the job of unlarding his frame. Shortly he was Corporal Ginsburg—a trim upstanding corporal. Then he became Sergeant Ginsburg and soon after this was Second Sergeant Ginsburg of B Company of a regiment still somewhat sketchy and ragged in its make-up, but with promise of good stuff to emerge from the mass of its material. When his regiment and his division went overseas, First Sergeant Ginsburg went along too.

The division had started out by being a national guard division; almost exclusively its rank and file had been city men—rich men's sons from uptown, poor men's sons with jaw-breaking names from the tenements. At the beginning the acting major general in command

had been fond of boasting that he had representatives of thirty-two nations and practitioners of fifty-four creeds and cults in his outfit. Before very long he might truthfully expand both these figures.

To stopper the holes made by the wear and tear of intensive training, the attritions of sickness and of transfers, the losses by death and by wounding as suffered in the first small spells of campaigning, replacements came up from the depots, enriching the local colour of the division with new types and strange accents. Southern mountaineers, Western ranch hands and farm boys from the Middle States came along to find mates among Syrians, Jews, Italians, Armenians and Greeks. Cotton Belt, Corn Belt, Wheat Belt and Timber Belt contributed. Born feudists became snipers, counter jumpers became fencibles, yokels became drillmasters, sweat-shop hands became sharpshooters, aliens became Americans, an ex-janitor—Austrian-born—became a captain, a rabble became an organised unit; the division became a tempered mettlesome lance—springy, sharp and dependable.

This miracle so often repeated itself in our new army that it ceased to be miraculous and became commonplace. During its enactment we as a nation accepted it with calmness, almost with indifference. I expect our grandchildren will marvel at it and among them will be some who will write large, fat books about it.

On that great day when a new definition for the German equivalent of the English word "impregnable" was furnished by men who went up to battle swearfully or prayerfully, as the case might be, a-swearing and a-praying as they went in more tongues than were babbled at Babel Tower; in other words, on the day when the never-to-be-broken Hindenburg line was broken through and through, a battalion of one of the infantry regiments of this same polyglot division formed a little individual ground swell in the first wave of attack.

That chill and gloomy hour when condemned men and milkmen rise up from where they lie, when sick folk die in their beds and the drowsy birds begin to chirp themselves awake found the men of this particular battalion in shallow front-line trenches on the farther edge of a birch thicket. There they crouched, awaiting the word. The flat cold taste of before sunup was clammy in their throats; the smell of the fading nighttime was in their nostrils.

And in the heart of every man of them that man over and over again asked himself a question. He asked himself whether his will power—which meant his soul—was going to be strong enough to drag his reluctant body along with it into what impended. You see, with a very few exceptions none of this outfit had been beyond the wires before. They had been under fire, some of them—fire of gas shells and of shrapnel and of high explosives in dugouts or in rear

positions or as they passed along roads lying under gun range of the enemy. But this matter would be different; this experience would widely differ from any they had undergone. This meant going out into the open to walk up against machine-gun fire and small-arm fire. So each one asked himself the question.

Take a thousand fighting men. For purposes of argument let us say that when the test of fighting comes five men out of that thousand cannot readjust their nerves to the prospect of a violent end by powder and ball from unseen sources. Under other circumstances any one of the five might face a peril greater than that which now confronts him. Conceivably he might flop into a swollen river to save a drowning puppy; might dive into a burning building after some stranger's pet tabby cat. But this prospect which lies before him of ambling across a field with death singing about his ears, is a thing which tears with clawing fingers at the tuggs and toggles of his imagination until his flesh revolts to the point where it refuses the dare. It is such a man that courts-martial and the world at large miscall by the hateful name of coward.

Out of the remaining nine hundred and ninety-five are five more—as we allow—who have so little of perception, who are so stolid, so dull of wit and apprehension that they go into battle unmoved, unshaken, unthinking. This leaves nine hundred and ninety who are

afraid—sorely and terribly afraid. They are afraid of being killed, afraid of being crippled, afraid of venturing out where killings and cripplings are carried on as branches of a highly specialised business.

But at the last they find that they fear just one thing more than they fear death and dismemberment; and that this one supremest thing is the fear that those about them may discover how terribly afraid they are. It is this greater fear, overriding all those lesser terrors, that makes over ordinary men into leaders of forlorn hopes, into holders of last ditches, into bearers of heroic blazons, into sleepers under memorial shafts erected by the citizens of a proud, a grateful and a sorrowing country. A sense of self-respect is a terrific responsibility.

Under this double stress, torn in advance of the actual undertaking by primitive emotions pulling in opposite directions, men bear themselves after curious but common fashions. To a psychologist twenty men chosen at random from the members of the battalion, waiting there in the edge of the birch thicket for their striking hour to come, would have offered twenty contrasting subjects for study.

Here was a man all deathly white, who spoke never a word, but who retched with sharp painful sounds and kept his free hand gripped into his cramping belly. That dread of being hit in the bowels which so many men have at

moments like this was making him physically sick.

Here again was a man who made jokes about cold feet and yellow streaks and the chances of death and the like and laughed at his own jokes. But there was a quiver of barely checked hysteria in his laughing and his eyes shone like the eyes of a man in a fever and the sweat kept popping out in little beads on his face.

Here again was a man who swore constantly in a monotonous undertone. Always I am reading where a man of my race under strain or provocation coins new and apt and picturesque oaths; but myself, I have never seen such a man. I should have seen him, too, if he really existed anywhere except in books, seeing that as a boy I knew many steamboat mates on Southern waters and afterward met socially many and divers mule drivers and horse wranglers in the great West.

But it has been my observation that in the matter of oaths the Anglo-Saxon tongue is strangely lacking in variety and spice. There are a few stand-by oaths—three or four nouns, two or three adjectives, one double-jointed adjective—and these invariably are employed over and over again. The which was undeniably true in this particular instance. This man who swore so steadily merely repeated, times without number and presumably with reference to the Germans, the unprettiest and at the same time the most familiar name of

compounded opprobrium that our deficient language yields.

For the fiftieth time in half as many minutes, a captain—his name was Captain Griswold and he was the captain of B Company—consulted the luminous face of his wrist watch where he stooped behind shelter. He spoke then, and his voice was plainly to be heard under the whistle and whoop of the shells passing over his head from the supporting batteries behind with intent to fall in the supposed defences of the enemy in front. Great sounds would have been lost in that crashing tumult; by one of the paradoxes of battle lesser sounds were easily audible.

"All right," said Captain Griswold, "it's time! If some damn fool hasn't gummed things up the creeping barrage should be starting out yonder and everything is set. Come on, men—let's go!"

They went, each still behaving according to his own mode. The man with the gripes who retched was still retching as he heaved himself up over the parapet; the man who had laughed was still laughing; the man who had sworn was mechanically continuing to repeat that naughty pet name of his for the Fritzies. Nobody, though, called on anybody else to defend the glory of the flag; nobody invited anybody to remember the *Lusitania;* nobody spoke a single one of the fine speeches which the bushelmen of fiction at home were even then thinking up to

put into the mouths of men moving into battle.

Indeed, not in any visible regard was the scene marked by drama. Merely some muddied men burdened with ironmongery and bumpy with gas masks and ammunition packs climbed laboriously out of a slit in the wet earth and in squads—single filing, one man behind the next as directly as might be—stepped along through a pale, sad, slightly misty light at rather a deliberate pace, to traverse a barb-wired meadowland which rose before them at a gentle incline. There was no firing of guns, no waving of swords. There were no swords to wave. There was no enemy in sight and no evidence as yet that they had been sighted by any enemy. As a matter of fact, none of them—neither those who fell nor those who lived—saw on that day a single living individual recognisable as a German.

A sense of enormous isolation encompassed them. They seemed to be all alone in a corner of the world that was peopled by diabolical sounds, but not by humans. They had a feeling that because of an error in the plans they had been sent forward without supports; that they—a puny handful—were to be sacrificed under the haunches of the Hindenburg line while all those thousands of others who should have been their companions upon this adventure bided safely behind, held back by the countermand which through some hideous

blunder had failed to reach them in time. But they went on. Orders were to go on—and order, plus discipline, plus the individual's sense of responsibility, plus that fear of his that his mates may know how fearful of other things he is—make it possible for armies to be armies instead of mobs and for battles to be won.

They went on until they came to an invisible line drawn lengthwise across the broad way of the weed field, and here men began to drop down. Mainly those stricken slid gently forward to lie on their stomachs. Only here and there was there a man who spun about to fall face upward. Those who were wounded, but not overthrown, would generally sit down quite gently and quite deliberately, with puzzled looks in their eyes. Since still there was neither sign nor sight of the well-hidden enemy the thought took root in the minds of the men as yet unscathed that, advancing too fast, they had been caught in the drop curtain of their own barrage.

Sergeant Hyman Ginsburg, going along at the head of his squad, got this notion quite well fixed in his mind. Then, though, he saw smoke jets issuing from bushes and trees on ahead of him where the ridges of the slope sharpened up acutely into a sort of natural barrier like a wall; and likewise for the first time he now heard the tat-tat-tat of machine guns, sounding like the hammers of pneumatic

riveters rapidly operated. To him it seemed a proper course that his squad should take such cover as the lay of the land afforded and fire back toward the machine guns. But since the instructions, so far as he knew them, called for a steady advance up to within a few rods of the enemy's supposed position and then a quick rush forward, he gave no such command to his squad.

Suddenly he became aware that off to the right the forward movement of the battalion was checking up. Then, all in an instant, men on both sides were falling back. He and his squad were enveloped in a reverse movement. It seemed too bad that the battalion should be driven in after suffering these casualties and without having dealt a blow in return for the punishment it had undergone. But what did it matter if, after all, they were being sacrificed vainly as the result of a hideous mistake at divisional headquarters? Better to save what was left.

So far as he could tell, nobody gave the word to retire. He found himself going back at the tail of his squad where before he had been its head. Subconsciously he was surprised to observe that the copse from which they had emerged but a minute or two earlier, as he had imagined, was a considerable distance away from them, now that they had set their faces toward it. It did not seem possible that they could have left it so far behind them. Yet

returning to it the men did not perceptibly hurry their steps. They retreated without evidences of disorder—almost reluctantly—as though by this very slowness of movement to signify their disgust for the supposed fiasco that had enveloped them, causing them to waste lives in an ill-timed and futile endeavour.

Ginsburg reëntered the covert of birches with a sense of gratitude for its protection and let himself down into the trench. He faced about, peering over its rim, and saw that his captain—Captain Griswold—was just behind him, returning all alone and looking back over his shoulder constantly.

Captain Griswold was perhaps twenty yards from the thicket when he clasped both hands to the pit of his stomach and slipped down flat in the trampled herbage. In that same moment Ginsburg saw how many invisible darting objects, which must of course be machine-gun bullets, were mowing the weed stems about the spot where the captain had gone down. Bits of turf flew up in showers as the leaden blasts, spraying down from the top of the ridge, bored into the earth.

Well, somebody would have to bring the captain in out of that. He laid his rifle against the wall of the trench and climbed out again into plain view. So far as he knew he was going as a solitary volunteer upon this errand. He put one arm across his face, like a man fending off rain drops, and ran bent forward.

The captain, when he reached him, was lying upon his side with his face turned away from Ginsburg and his shrapnel helmet half on and half off his head. Ginsburg stooped, putting his hands under the pits of the captain's arms, and gave a heave. The burden of the body came against him as so much dead heft; a weight limp and unresponsive, the trunk sagging, the limbs loose and unguided.

Ginsburg felt a hard buffet in his right side. It wasn't a blow exactly; it was more like a clout from a heavily-shod blunt-ended brogan. His last registered impression as he collapsed on top of the captain was that someone, hurrying up to aid him, had stumbled and driven a booted toe into his ribs. Thereafter for a space events—in so far as Ginsburg's mind recorded them—were hazy, with gaps between of complete forgetfulness. He felt no pain to speak of, but busybodies kept bothering him. It drowsily annoyed him to be dragged about, to be lifted up and to be put down again, to be pawed over by unseen, dimly comprehended hands, to be ridden in a careening, bumping vehicle for what seemed to him hours and hours. Finally, when he was striving to reorganise his faculties for the utterance of a protest, someone put something over his nose and he went sound asleep.

Ensued then a measureless period when he slept and dreamed strange jumbled dreams. He awakened, clear enough in his thoughts,

but beset with a queer giddiness and a weakness, in a hospital sixteen miles from where the mix-up had started, though he didn't know about that of course until subsequent inquiry enabled him to piece together a number of fragmentary recollections. For the present he was content to realise that he lay on a comfortable cot under a tight roof and that he had his full complement of arms and legs and could move them, though when he moved the right leg the ankle hurt him. Also he had a queer squeezed-in sensation amidships as though broad straps had been buckled tightly about his trunk.

Upon top of these discoveries came another. Sitting up in the next-hand cot to his on the right was a member of his own company, one Paul Dempsey, now rather elaborately bandaged as to his head and shoulders, but seemingly otherwise in customary good order and spirits.

"Hello, Dempsey," he said.

"Hello, sarge," answered back Dempsey. "How you feelin' by now—all right?"

"Guess so. My ankle is sprained or something and my side feels sort of funny."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Dempsey. "I got a dippy kind of feelin' inside my own headpiece—piece of shell casin' come and beaned me. It don't amount to much, though; just enough to get me a wound stripe. You're the lucky guy, sarge. Maybe it's so you won't have to go back and prob'ly I will."

The speaker sighed and grinned and then confessed to a great perception which many before him had known and which many were to know afterward, but which some—less frank than he—have sought to conceal.

"I'll go back of course if they need me—and if I have to—but I'd just as lief not. You kin take it from me, I've had plenty of this gettin' all-shot-up business. Oncet is enough for First-Class Private Dempsey.

"Say," he went on, "looks like you and me are goin' partners a lot here lately. I get mine right after you get yours. We ride back here together in the same tin Lizzie—you and me do—and now here we are side by each again. Well, there's a lot of the fellows we won't neither of us see no more. But their lives wasn't wasted, at that. I betcher there's a lot of German bein' spoke in hell these last two or three days.

"Oh, you ain't heard the big news, have you? Bein' off your dip and out of commission like you was. Well, we busted old Mister Hindenburg's line in about nine places and now it looks like maybe we'll eat Thanksgivin' dinner in Berlin or Hoboken—one."

Dempsey went on and every word that he uttered was news—how the seemingly premature advance of the battalion had not been a mistake at all; how the only slip was that the battalion walked into a whole cote of unsuspected machine-gun nests, but how the second

battalion going up and round the shore of the hill to the left had taken the boche on the flank and cleaned him out of his pretty little ambuscade; how there were tidings of great cheer filtering back from all along the line and so forth and so on. Ginsburg broke in on him:

"How's Captain Griswold?"

"Oh, the cap was as good as dead when this here guy, Goodman, fetched him in on his back after he'd went out after you fell and fetched you back in first. I seen the whole thing myself—it was right after that that I got beaned. One good scout, the cap was. And there ain't nothin' wrong with this Goodman, neither; you kin take it from me."

"Goodman?" Ginsburg pondered. The name was a strange one. "Say, was it this Goodman that kicked me in the ribs while I was tryin' to pick up the captain?"

"Kicked you nothin'! You got a machine-gun bullet glancin' on your short ribs and acrost your chest right under the skin—that was what put you down and out. And then just as Goodman fetched you in acrost over the top here come another lot of machine-gun bullets, and one of 'em drilled you through the ankle and another one of them bored Goodman clean through the shoulder; but that didn't keep him from goin' right back out there, shot up like he was, after the captain. Quick as a cat that guy was and strong as a bull. Naw, Goodman

he never kicked you—that was a little chunk of lead kicked you."

"But I didn't feel any pain like a bullet," protested Ginsburg. "It was more like a hard wallop with a club or a boot."

"Say, that's a funny thing too," said Dempsey. "You're always readin' about the sharp dartin' pain a bullet makes, and yet nearly everybody that gets hit comes out of his trance ready to swear a mule muster kicked him or somethin'. I guess that sharp-dartin'-pain stuff runs for Sweeney; the guys that write about it oughter get shot up themselves oncet. Then they'd know."

"This Goodman, now?" queried Ginsburg, trying to chamber many impressions at once. "I don't seem to place him. He wasn't in B Company?"

"Naw! He's out of D Company. He's a new guy. He's out of a bunch of replacements that come up for D Company only the day before yistiddy. Well, for a green hand he certainly handled himself like one old-timer."

Dempsey, aged nineteen, spoke as the grizzled veteran of many campaigns might have spoken.

"Yes, sir! He certainly snatched you out of a damn bad hole in jig time."

"I'd like to have a look at him," said Ginsburg. "And my old mother back home would, too, I know."

"Your mother'll have to wait, but you kin have your wish," said Dempsey gleefully. He

had been saving his biggest piece of news for the last. "If you've got anything to ask him just ask him. He's layin' there—right over there on the other side of you. We all three of us rode down here together in the same amb'-lance load."

Ginsburg turned his head. Above the blanket that covered the figure of his cot neighbour on the right he looked into the face of the man who had saved him—looked into it and recognised it. That dark skin, clear though, with a transparent pallor to it like brown stump water in a swamp, and those black eyes between the slitted lids could belong to but one person on earth. If the other had overheard what just had passed between Ginsburg and Dempsey he gave no sign. He considered Ginsburg steadily, with a cool, hostile stare in his eyes.

"Much obliged, buddy," said Ginsburg. Something already had told him that here revealed was a secret not to be shared with a third party.

"Don't mention it," answered his late rescuer shortly. He drew a fold of the blanket up across his face with the gesture of one craving solitude or sleep.

"Huh!" quoth Dempsey. "Not what I'd call a talkative guy."

This shortcoming could not be laid at his own door. He talked steadily on. After a while, though, a reaction of weariness began to blunt Dempsey's sprightly vivacity. His talk trailed

off into grunts and he slept the sleep of a hurt tired-out boy.

Satisfied that Dempsey no longer was to be considered in the rôle of a possible eavesdropper, Ginsburg nevertheless spoke cautiously as again he turned his face toward the motionless figure stretched alongside him on his left.

"Listening?" he began.

"Yes," gruffly.

"When did you begin calling yourself Goodman?"

"That's my business."

"No, it's not. Something has happened that gives me the right to know. Forget that I used to be on the cops. I'm asking you now as one soldier to another: When did you begin calling yourself Goodman?"

"About a year ago—when I first got into the service."

"How did you get in?"

"Enlisted."

"Where? New York?"

"No. Cleveland."

"What made you enlist?"

"Say, wot's this—thoid-degree stuff?"

"I told you just now that I figured I had a right to know. When a man saves your life it puts him under an obligation to you—I mean puts you under an obligation to him," he corrected.

"Well, if you put it that way—maybe it was because I wanted to duck out of reach of you

bulls. Maybe because I wanted to go straight a while. Maybe because I wanted to show that a bad guy could do somethin' for his country. Dope it out for yourself. That used to be your game—dopin' things out—wasn't it?"

"I'm trying to, now. Tell me, does anybody know—anybody in the Army, I mean—know who you are?"

"Nobody but you; and you might call it an accident, the way you come to find out."

"Something like that. How's your record since you joined up?"

"Clean as anybody's."

"And what's your idea about keeping on going straight after the war is over and you get out of service?

"Don't answer unless you feel like it; only I've got my own private reasons for wanting to know."

"Well, I know a trade—learnt it in stir, but I know it. I'm a steamfitter by trade, only I ain't never worked much at it. Maybe when I get back I'd try workin' at it steady if you flatties would only keep off me back. Anything else you wanted to find out?" His tone was sneering almost. "If there's not, I think I'll try to take a nap."

"Not now—but I'd like to talk to you again about some things when we're both rested up."

"Have it your own way. I can't get away from you for a while—not with this hole drilled in me shoulder."

However, Ginsburg did not have it his own way. The wound in his leg gave threat of trouble and at once he was shifted south to one of the big base hospitals. An operation followed and after that a rather long, slow convalescence.

In the same week of November that the armistice was signed, Ginsburg, limping slightly, went aboard a troopship bound for home. It befell, therefore, that he spent the winter on sick leave in New York. He had plenty of spare time on his hands and some of it he employed in business of a more or less private nature. For example, he called on the district attorney and a few days later went to Albany and called upon the governor. A returned soldier whose name has been often in the paper and who wears on his uniform tunic two bits of ribbon and on his sleeves service and wound stripes is not kept waiting in anterooms these times. He saw the governor just as he had seen the district attorney—promptly. In fact, the governor felt it to be an honour to meet a soldier who had been decorated for gallantry in action and so expressed himself. Later he called in the reporters and restated the fact; but when one of the reporters inquired into the reasons for Sergeant Ginsburg's visit at this time the governor shook his head.

"The business between us was confidential," he said smilingly. "But I might add that Sergeant Ginsburg got what he came for. And

it wasn't a job either. I'm afraid, though, that you young gentlemen will have to wait a while for the rest of the details. They'll come out in time no doubt. But just for the present a sort of surprise is being planned for someone and while I'm to be a party to it I don't feel at liberty to tell about it—yet."

Now it is a part of the business of newspaper men to put two and two together and get four. Months later, recalling what the governor had said to the Albany correspondents, divers city editors with the aid of their bright young staff men did put two and two together and they got a story. It was a peach of a bird of a gem of a story that they got on the day a transport nosed up the harbour bearing what was left of one of the infantry regiments of the praiseworthy Metropolitan Division.

Even in those days of regardless receptions for home-arriving troops it did not often happen that a secretary to the governor and an assistant from the office of the district attorney went down the bay on the same tug to meet the same returning soldier—and he a private soldier at that. Each of these gentlemen had put on his long-tailed coat and his two-quart hat for the gladsome occasion; each of them carried a document for personal presentation to this private soldier.

And the sum total of these documents was: Firstly, to the full legal effect that a certain

indictment of long standing was now by due processes of law forever and eternally quashed; and secondly, that the governor had seen fit to remove all disabilities against a certain individual, thereby restoring the person named to all the rights, boons, benefits and privileges of citizenship; and thirdly, that in accordance with a prior and privy design, now fully carried out, the recipient of these documents had official guaranty, stamped, sealed and delivered, that when he set foot on the soil of these United States he would do so without cloud upon his title as a sovereign voter, without blemish on his name and without fear of prosecution in his heart. And the upshot of it all was that the story was more than a peach; it was a pippin. The rehabilitation of Private Pasquale Gallino, sometime known as Stretchy Gorman, gangster, and more latterly still as P. Goodman, U. S. A., A. E. F., was celebrated to the extent of I don't know how many gallons of printer's ink.

Having landed in driblets and having been reassembled in camp as a whole, the division presently paraded, which made another story deemed worthy of columns upon columns in print. Our duty here, though, is not to undertake a description of that parade, for such was competently done on that fine day when the crowd that turned out was the largest crowd which that city of crowds, New York, had seen since the day when the crowding Dutchmen

crowded the Indians off the shortly-to-be-crowded island of Manhattan.

Those who followed the daily chronicles of daily events saw then, through the eyes of gifted scribes, how Fifth Avenue was turned into a four-mile stretch of prancing, dancing glory; and how the outpouring millions, in masses fluid as water and in strength irresistible as a flood, broke the police dams and made of roadway and sidewalks one great, roaring, human sluiceway; and how the khaki-clad ranks marched upon a carpet of the flowers and the fruit and the candy and the cigarettes and the cigars and the confetti and the paper ribbons that were thrown at them and about them. These things are a tale told and retold. For us the task is merely to narrate one small incident which occurred in a side street hard by Washington Square while the parade was forming.

Where he stood marking time in the front row of the honour men of his own regiment—there being forty-six of these honour men, all bearing upon their proudly outbulged bosoms bits of metal testifying to valorous deeds—First Sergeant Hyman Ginsburg, keeping eyes front upon the broad back of the colonel who would ride just in advance of the honour squad and speaking out of the side of his mouth, addressed a short, squat, dark man in private's uniform almost directly behind him at the end of the second file.

"Pal," he said, casting his voice over his shoulder, "did you happen to read in the paper this morning that the police commissioner—the new one, the one that was appointed while we were in France—would be in the reviewing stand to-day?"

"No, I didn't read it; but wot of it?" answered the person addressed.

"Nothing, only it reminded me of a promise I made you that night down at the Stuffed Owl when we met for the first time since we were kids together. Remember that promise, don't you?"

"Can't say I do."

"I told you that some day I'd get you with the goods on you and that I'd lead you in broad daylight up the street to the big chief. Well, to-day, kid, I make good on that promise. The big chief's waiting for us up yonder in the reviewing stand along with the governor and the mayor and the rest. And you've got the goods on you—you're wearing them on your chest. And I'm about to lead you to him."

Whereupon old Mr. John J. Coincidence, standing in the crowd, took out his fountain pen and on his shirt cuff scored a fresh tally to his own credit.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN AUGUST THE SECOND WAS APRIL THE FIRST

HOW Ethan A. Pratt, formerly of South New Medford, in the State of Vermont, came to be resident manager and storekeeper for the British Great Eastern Company, Ltd., on Good Friday Island, in the South Seas, is not our present concern. Besides, the way of it makes too long a tale for telling here. It is sufficient to say he was.

Never having visited that wide, long, deep and mainly liquid backside of the planet known broadly as the South Seas but always intending to do so, I must largely depend for my local colour upon what Ethan Pratt wrote back home to South New Medford; on that, plus what returned travellers to those parts have from time to time told me. So if in this small chronicle those paragraphs which purport to be of a descriptive nature appear incomplete to readers personally acquainted with the spots dealt with or with spots like them the fault, in some degree at least, must rest upon the fact

that I have had my main dependence in the preserved letters of one who was by no means a sprightly correspondent, but on the contrary was by way of being somewhat prosy, not to say commonplace, on his literary side.

From the evidence extant one gathers that for the four years of his life he spent on Good Friday Island Ethan Pratt lived in the rear room of a two-room house of frame standing on a beach with a little village about it, a jungle behind it, a river half-mooning it and a lagoon before it. In the rear room he bedded and baited himself. The more spacious front room into which his housekeeping quarters opened was a store of sorts where he retailed print goods staple, tinned foods assorted and gimcracks various to his customers, these mostly being natives. The building was crowned with a tin roof and on top of the roof there perched a round water tank, like a high hat on a head much too large for it. The use of this tank was to catch and store up rain water, which ran into it from the sloping top of a larger and taller structure standing partly alongside and partly back of the lesser structure. The larger building—a shed it properly was; a sprawling wide-eaved barracks of a shed—was for the storing of copra, the chief article for export produced on Good Friday Island.

Copra, as all know—or as all should know, since it has come to be one of the most essential vegetable products of the world, a thing needful

in the manufacture of nearly every commercial output in which fatty essences are required—is the dried meat of the nut of the coconut palm. So rich is it in oils that soap makers—to cite one of the industries employing it—scarce could do without it; but like many of this earth's most profitable and desirable yieldings it has its unpretty aspects. For one thing it stinks most abominably while it is being cured, and after it has been cured it continues to stink, with a lessened intensity. For another thing, the all-pervading reek of the stuff gets into food that is being prepared anywhere in its bulked vicinity.

Out in front of the establishment over which Ethan Pratt presided, where the sandy beach met the waters, was a rickety little wharf like a hyphen to link the grit with the salt. Down to the outer tip of the wharf ran a narrow-gauge track of rusted iron rails, and over the track on occasion plied little straddlebug handcars. Because the water offshore was shoal ships could not come in very close but must lie well out in the lagoon and their unloadings and their reloadings were carried on by means of whaleboats ferrying back and forth between ship side and dock side with the push cars to facilitate the freight movement at the land end of the connection. This was a laborious and a vexatious proceeding, necessitating the handling and rehandling of every bit of incoming or outbound cargo several times. But then, steamers

did not come very often to Good Friday Island; one came every two months about.

The expanse upon which Ethan Pratt looked when he turned his eyes outward was of an incredible whiteness. You would have thought it to be the whitest, most blinding thing in the world until you considered the road that skirted it and some of the buildings that bordered it. For the road was built of crushed coral, so dazzlingly white that to look fixedly at it for thirty seconds in bright weather was to make the eyeballs ache; and the buildings referred to were built of blocks of white coral like exaggerated cubes of refined sugar. These buildings were the chapels and churches—Methodist, Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, English Wesleyan and American Mormon. When the sun shone clear the water on beyond became a shimmering blazing shield of white-hot metal; and an hour of uninterrupted gazing upon it would have turned an argus into a blinkard. But other times—early morning or evening or when stormy weather impended—the lagoon became all a wonderful deep clear blue, the colour of molten stained glass. One peering then into its depths saw, far down below, marvellous sea gardens all fronded and ferny and waving; and through the foliage of this fairyland went darting schools and shoals of fish queerly shaped and as brilliantly coloured as tropical birds.

At the top of the beach, girdling it on its land

side, and stencilling themselves against the sky line, ran a fringing of coconut palms. The trunks were naked almost to the tops, where the foliage revealed itself in flaring clumps of green. Viewed separately a tree was suggestive of a great bird standing on one leg with its head hidden under its wing, its rump upreared and its splayed tail feathers saluting the skies. Viewed together they made a spectacle for which nothing in the temperate zones, animal or vegetable, offers a measurable comparison. When the wind blew softly the trees whispered among themselves. When the wind blew hard and furiously, as often it did, or when the trade breeze swelled to hurricane speed, the coconuts in their long bearded husks would be wrenched free and would come hurtling through the air like fletched cannon balls. When one of them struck a tin roof there resulted a terrific crashing sound fit to wake the dead and to stun the living.

Living there Pratt's diet was mainly tinned salmon, which tasted faintly of tin and strongly of copra; and along with the salmon, crackers, which in this climate were almost always flabby with dampness and often were afflicted with greenish mould. Salmon and crackers had come to be his most dependable stand-bys in the matter of provender. True the natives brought him gifts of food dishes; dishes cooked without salt and pleasing to the Polynesian palate. Coming out upon his balcony of a

morning he would find swinging from a cross-beam a basket made of the green palm leaves and containing a chicken or a fish prepared according to the primitive native recipe, or perhaps a mess of wild greens baked on hot stones; or maybe baked green bananas or taro or yams or hard crusty halves of baked breadfruit.

To the white man yams and taro taste mighty good at first, but eventually he sickens of them. Pratt sickened sooner than some white men had; and almost from the first the mere sight and savour of a soft-fleshed baked fish had made his gorge rise in revolt. So he fell back upon staples of his own land and ate salmon and crackers.

This island where he lived was an island of smells and insects. Consider first the matter of the prevalent smells: When the copra was curing and the village green was studded with thousands of little cusps, each being brown without and milk-white within, and each destined to remain there until the heat had dried the nut meats to the proper brownish tone, there rose and spread upon the air a stench so thick and so heavy as to be almost visible; a rancid, hot, rottenish stench. Then, when the wind blew off the seas it frequently brought with it the taint of rotted fish. Sniffing this smell Ethan Pratt would pray for a land breeze; but since he hated perfumed smells almost as intensely as he hated putrescent ones, a land breeze was no treat to his nose either, for it came freighted

with the sickish odour of the frangipane and of a plant the islanders call *mosooi*, overpowering in their combined sweetness.

In his letters he complained much of these smells and likewise much of the heat, but more than of either he complained of the insects. It would appear that the mosquitoes worked on him in shifts. By day there came day mosquitoes, creatures of the sunlight and matching it in a way, seeing that they were big grey-striped fellows with keen and strident voices. By night there were small vicious mosquitoes, in colour an appropriate black and in habit more bloodthirsty than Uhlans. After dark the flame of his kerosene lamp was to them as the traditional light in the traditional casement is to returning wanderers. It brought them in millions, and with them tiny persistent gnats and many small coffin-shaped beetles and hosts of pulpy, unwholesome-looking moths of many sizes and as many colours. Screens and double screens at the window openings did not avail to keep these visitors out. Somehow they found a way in. The mosquitoes and the gnats preyed upon him; the beetles and the moths were lured by the flame to a violent end. To save the wick from being clogged by their burnt bodies he hooded the top of the lamp with netting. This caused the lamp chimney to smoke and foul itself with soot. To save his shins from attack he wrapped his legs in newspaper buskins. For his hands and his face and

his neck and his ears he could devise no protection.

To be encountered just outside the door were huge flying cockroaches that clung in his hair or buffeted him in the face as they blundered along on purposeless flights. Still other insects, unseen but none the less busy, added to the burden of his jeremiad. Borers riddled the pages of his books; and the white ant, as greedy for wood pulp as a paper baron, was constantly sapping and mining the underpinnings of his house.

Touching on the climate his tone was most rebellious. By all accounts the weather was rarely what one born in Vermont would regard as seasonable weather. According to him its outstanding characteristics were heat, moistness and stickiness. If he took a nap in the afternoon he rose from it as from a Turkish bath. His hair was plastered to his head all day with dampness; his forehead and his face ran sweat; his wrists were as though they had been parboiled and freshly withdrawn from the water. Perspiration glued his garments to his frame. His shoes behind the door turned a leprous white from mildew and rotted to pieces while yet they were new.

The forest, into which he sometimes ventured, was a place of dampness, deepness and smells; a place of great trees, fat fungoids, sprawling creepers, preposterous looking parasites, orchids, lianas; a place of things that

crawled and climbed and twined and clung. It was filled with weird sounds—the booming of wild pigeons; a nagging, tapping sound as though woodchoppers were at work far off in its depths; and a constant insane chattering sound, as though mad children, hidden all about him, were laughing at him. Dusk brought from their coverts the flying foxes, to utter curious notes as they sailed through the gloaming, and occasionally sharp squeaks as of mortal agony or intense gratification—he couldn't make up his mind which. After nightfall if he flung a burning cigar stump out upon the sand he could see it moving off in the darkness apparently under its own motive power. But the truth was that a land crab, with an unsolvable mania for playing the rôle of torchbearer, would be scuttling away with the stub in one of its claws.

The forest sheltered no dangerous beasts and no venomous reptiles but in it were stinging nettles the touch of which was like fire to a sensitive white skin. Also, the waters of the lagoon were free from man-eaters, but wading close to shore one was almost sure to bark one's shanks on the poisoned coral, making sores that refused to heal. Against the river, which flowed down out of the interior to the sea, Pratt likewise bore a grudge, because it was in the river that a brown woman washed his clothes on the stones, returning them with the buttons pounded off; but for every missing button there

was sure to be a bright yellow, semi-indelible stain, where the laundress had spread the garments to dry upon a wild berry bush.

Every two months the steamer came. Then the white population of the station doubled and trebled itself. Traders and storekeepers came by canoe from outlying islands or from remote stations on the farther side of his own island, for Good Friday Island had but one port of entry and this was it. Beachcombers who had been adopted into villages in the interior sauntered in over jungle trails. Many of them were deserters from whalers or from naval vessels; nearly all were handsome chaps in an animal sort of way.

For this common sharing of a common comeliness among them there was a reason. In a land where physical perfection literally is worshipped, good-looking men, brawny and broad, are surest of winning an asylum and wives and tribal equality. To Pratt it seems to have been a source of wonderment that almost without exception they were blue-eyed and light-haired; he could understand of course why their skins, once fair and white, had changed to the colour of well-tanned calfskin. The sun beating upon their naked bodies had done that.

There also would be present a party of overseers and managers from a big German plantation on an adjacent island. The traders and the Germans would appear in white ducks with

white shoes smartly pipe-clayed, and white straw hats. The beachcombers would be in clean pyjama suits with bright-coloured neckties. Ordinarily these latter went about bare-headed, bare-legged and bare-bodied except for the lava-lava made of fibre from the paper mulberry tree and worn like a kilt about the hips; but now, in white men's garments, they sought to prove that they still were white men and civilised white men too. If the steamer were late, as very often happened, some of the visitors would take advantage of the wait to make themselves roaring drunk on gin.

So much briefly, for the stage setting of Ethan Pratt's environment; now for the personality of the man: Of all the breeds and the mixed breeds that have gravitated out of white lands into these sea islands of darker-skinned peoples, there surely was never a more incongruous, more alien figure than this man presented. For you should know that in all things he was most typical of what is most typical in a certain cross-section of New England life—not the coastwise New England of a seafaring, far-ranging, adventurous race, but the New England of long-settled remote interior districts. He came of a farming stock and a storekeeping stock, bred out of the loins of forbears made hard by the task of chiselling a livelihood off of flinty hillsides, made narrow by the pent-up communal system of isolated life, made honest and truthful by the influences behind them and

the examples before them of generations of straight-walking, strait-laced, God-dreading folk.

That form of moral dyspepsia known as the Puritanical conscience was his by right of inheritance. In his nature there was no flexibility, no instinct for harmonious adaptability to any surroundings excepting those among which he had been born and in which he intended to end his days. Temperamentally he was of a fast colour. The leopard cannot change the spots and neither could he change his; nor did he will so to do. In short he was what he was, just as God and prenatal reactions had fashioned him, and so he would remain to the end of the chapter.

For all the four years he had spent out there the lure of the South Seas—about which so much has been written that it must be a verity and not a popular myth—had never laid hold upon him. Its gorgeous physical beauty, its languor, its voluptuous colour and abandon, its prodigally glorious dawns and its velvety nights—held for him no value to be reckoned as an offset against climatic discomforts; it left him untouched. In it he never saw the wonderland that Stevenson made so vivid to stay-at-homes, nor felt for one instant the thrill that inspired Jack London to fine rhapsodising. In it he saw and he felt only the sense of an everlasting struggle against foreign elements and hostile forces.

Among the missionaries he had acquaintances but no friends. He despised the swaggering beachcombers who had flung off the decencies of civilisation along with the habiliments of civilisation and who found a marrowy sweetness in the husks of the prodigal. Even more he despised the hectoring Germans with their flaming red and yellow beards, their thick-lensed spectacles, their gross manners when among their own kind and their brutishness in all their dealings with the natives—a brutishness so universal among them that no Polynesian would work at any price for a German, and every German had to depend for his plantation labour upon imported black boys from the Solomons and from New Guinea, who having once been trapped or, to use the trade word, indented, were thereafter held in an enforced servitude and paid with the bondman's wage of bitter bread and bloody stripes.

He had never been able to get under the skin of a native; indeed he had never tried. In all the things that go to make up an understanding of a fellow mortal's real nature they still were to him as completely strangers as they had been on the day he landed in this place. Set down in the midst of a teeming fecundity he nevertheless remained as truly a castaway as though he had floated ashore on a bit of wreckage. He could have been no more and no less a maroon had the island which received him been a desert island instead of a populous one.

When a chief paid him a formal visit, bringing a gift of taro root and sitting for hours upon his veranda, the grave courtesy of the ceremony, in which a white man differently constituted might have taken joy, merely bored him unutterably. As for the native women, they had as little of sex appeal for him as he had for them—which was saying a good deal now, because he was short and of a meagre shape, and the scorn of the Polynesian girl for a little man is measureless. The girls of Good Friday Island called him by a name which sounded like "Pooh-pooh."

Among an English-speaking people it would have been a hard-enough lot to be pooh-poohed through life by every personable female one met. Here the coupled syllables carried an added sting of contemptuousness. In the language of the country they meant runty, mean-figured, undersized. A graceful girl, her naked limbs glistening with coconut oil, a necklet of flowers about her throat and a hibiscus bloom pasted to her cheek like a beauty spot, meeting him in the road would give him a derisive smile over her shoulder and with the unconscious cruelty of primitive folk would softly puff out "Pooh-pooh" through her pursed lips as she passed him by. And it hurt. Certain of the white residents called him Pooh-pooh too, which hurt more deeply.

How he hated the whole thing—the dampness which mildewed his shoes and rusted out his

nettings; the day heat which kept him bathed in clamminess; the pestiferous insects; the forest with its voices like sobbings and hammerings and demoniac chatterings; the food he had to eat; the company he had to keep; the chiefs who bored him; the girls who derided him; the beachcombers who nauseated him; the white sands, the blue waters, the smells, the sounds, the routine of existence with one day precisely like another—the whole thing of it. We may picture him as a humid duck-legged little man, most terribly homesick, most tremendously lonely, most distressingly alien. We may go further and picture him as a sort of combination of Job with his afflictions, Robinson Crusoe with no man Friday to cheer him in his solitude, and Peter the Hermit with no dream of a crusade to uplift him. In these four years his hair had turned almost white, yet he was still under forty.

To all about him, white people and brown people alike, the coming of the steamer was an event of supremest importance. For the islanders it meant a short season of excitement, most agreeable to their natures. For the whites it meant a fleeting but none the less delectable contact with the world outside, with lands beyond, upon which all of them, for this reason or that, had turned their backs, and to which some of them dared never return.

In his case the world did not mean the world at large but merely the small circumscribed

world of South New Medford, which was his world. To him South New Medford comprehended and summed up all that was really worth while. He welcomed the steamer not because it brought news of wars and rumours of wars nor tales of great events on this continent or in that archipelago, but because it brought to him a sheaf of letters, all addressed in the same prim handwriting and bearing the same postmark; and a sheaf of copies of the South New Medford *Daily Republican*. The letters he read at once greedily, but with the newspapers he had a different way. He shucked them out of their wrappers, arranged them in proper chronological order with those bearing the later dates at the bottom and those bearing the older dates upon the top of the heap, then stacked them on a shelf in his living room. And each morning he read a paper.

In the beginning of his sojourn on Good Friday Island he had made a grievous mistake. Following the arrival of the first steamer after he took over his duties as resident manager for the *British Great Eastern* he had indulged himself in a perfect orgy of reading. He had read all his *Daily Republicans* in two days' time, gorging himself on home news, on mention of familiar names and on visions of familiar scenes. Then had ensued sixty-odd days of emptiness until the steamer brought another batch of papers to him.

From that time on he read one paper a day

and one only. Reading it he lived the life of the town and became one of its citizens; a sharer at long distance in its joys, its sorrows and its small thrills. But never now did he read more than one paper in a single day; the lesson of those two months had sunk in. No temptation, howsoever strong—the desire to know how the divorce trial of the H. K. Peabodys turned out, the itch of yearning to learn whether the body of the man found drowned in Exeter Pond was identified—proved potent enough to pull him away from his rule. That the news he read was anywhere from ten weeks to four months old when it reached him did not matter; in fact he very soon forgot that such was the case. For two precious hours a day he was translated back to the day and date that the rumpled sheet in his hands carried on its first page. Afterward he reverted quite naturally and without conscious jar to the proper time of the year as advertised by the calendar.

His routine would be like this: He would rise early, before the heat of the day was upon Good Friday Island to make it steam and sweat and give off smells. He would shave himself and bathe and put on clean loose garments, all white except where the stains of the wild, yellow berries had blotched them. His breakfast he prepared himself, afterward washing the dishes. Then he would light his pipe or his cigar and take from the shelf the upper-

most copy of the pile of *Daily Republicans* there. With the love for tidiness and kemptness that was a part of him he would smooth out its creases, then sit down on his veranda to read it. Immediately he became detached from all his surroundings. By his concentration he was isolated from and insulated against all external influences. He was not in Good Friday Island then; he was in South New Medford.

Each morning he read his paper through from the top line of the first column of the first page to the bottom line of the last column of the fourth, or last, page. He read it all—news matter, local items, clippings, advertisements, want notices, church notices, lodge notices, patent insides of boiler plate, fashion department, household hints, farm hints, reprint, Births, Weddings and Deaths; syndicate stuff, rural correspondence—no line of its contents did he skip. With his eyes shut he could put his finger upon those advertisements which ran without change and occupied set places on this page or that; such, for instance, as the two-column display of J. Wesley Paxon, Livery Barn, Horses Kept and Baited, Vehicles at all hours, Funeral Attendance a Specialty; and the two-inch notice of the American Pantorium and Pressing Club, Membership $1.00 per Month, Garments Called For and Delivered, Phone No. 41, M. Pincus, Prop. He was like a miser with a loaf; no crumb, however

tiny, got away from him. To him there was more of absorbing interest in the appearance of the seventeen-year locust in Chittenden County than in a Balkan outbreak; less of interest in the failing state of health of the Czar than in the prospects for the hay crop in the Otter Creek valley.

When he had read on through to the last ink-smudged line he would reread the accounts of those matters which particularly attracted him on their first reading. Then reluctantly and still in his state of absorption, he would put the paper aside and going inside to a small desk would write his daily chapter in a bulky letter, the whole to be posted on the next steamer day. It was characteristic of the man that in his letter writing he customarily dealt in comment upon the minor affairs of South New Medford as they had passed in review before him in the printed columns, rather than in observations regarding witnessed occurrences in Good Friday Island. This writing stunt done, his day was done. The rest was dulness. Unutterable, grinding dulness—the monotony of dealing out wares to customers, of keeping his accounts, of posting his records to date, of performing his domestic chores.

From this dulness, though, there was sometimes an escape. To relieve the monotony of his cheerless grind of duties and obligations there came to him visions. And these visions, we may be very sure, mainly were induced by

what he had that day read and that day written. By virtue of a special conjury residing in these waking dreams of his, the little man peering nearsightedly at the shimmering white beach saw instead of a beach the first heavy fall of snow upon the withers of the Green Mountains; saw not unchanging stretches of sand but a blanket of purest fleece, frilled and flounced and scrolled after the drift wind had billowed it up in low places but otherwise smooth and fair except where it had been rutted by sleigh runners and packed by the snow-boltered hoofs of bay Dobbins and sorrel Dollies, the get of Morgan stock.

In the insane forest voices he heard the contented cacklings of fat hens scratching for provender beneath the gnarled limbs of ancient apple trees whose trunks all were so neatly whitewashed up to the lowermost boughs. Looking upon the settlement where he lived, set as it was like a white-and-green jewel in a ring of lush barbaric beauty, his fancy showed him the vista of a spinsterish-looking Main Street lined by dooryards having fences of pointed painted pickets, and behind the pickets, peonies and hollyhocks encroaching upon prim flagged walks which led back to the white-panelled doors of small houses buried almost to their eaves in lilac bushes and golden glow.

The magic of it made all things to match in with the image: Thus, for example, the tall palms with their feather-duster tops, bending

seaward, turned into broad elms standing in regular double rank, like Yankee militiamen on a muster day. And night times, when through his windows there came floating in the soft vowelsome voices of native fishermen paddling their canoes upon the lagoon and singing as they paddled, he felt himself translated many thousands of miles away to Wednesday evening prayer meeting in a squat, brick church with a wooden belfry rearing above its steep slated roof.

But in this last conjuring-up of a beloved scene there lay at the back of the trick more of reminiscence than imagination, since the airs the fishermen chanted were based, nearly all, upon Christian songs that the earlier missionaries had brought hither; the words might be Polynesian but the cadence that carried the words was likely to be the cadence of some pioneer hymnster.

And ever and always the vision had a certain delectable climax; a definite consummation most devoutly wished for. For its final upshot would be that Ethan Pratt would behold himself growing old in the peaceful safe harbour of South New Medford, anchored fast by his heartstrings to a small white cottage, all furbished and plenished within, all flowers and shrubs roundabout, with a kitchen garden at its back, and on beyond an orchard of whitewashed trees where buff cochins clucked beneath the ripening fruit, and on beyond this in turn a

hay meadow stretching away toward rising foothills.

He saw himself working in the flowers and tilling the vegetable garden. He watched himself quitting this haven to walk a sedate way to worship of a Sunday morning. With his mind's eye he followed his own course in a buggy along a country road in the fall of the year when the maples had turned and the goldenrod spread its carpet of tawny glory across the fields. And invariably his companion in these simple homely comfortable employments was a little woman who wore gold-rimmed glasses and starchy print frocks.

Into the picture no third figure ever obtruded. With her alone he conceived of himself as walking side by side through all the remaining days of his life. For this mousy methodical little man had his great romance. Unsuspected and undetected, inside the commonplace cover of his body it burned with a clear and a steady flame. It had burned there, never flickering, never wavering, through all the days of his faring into far and foreign parts. Since childhood the two of them had been engaged. It was she who wrote him the letters that came, a fat sheaf of them, by every steamer; it was to her that he wrote in reply. It was for the sake of her and in the intention of making a home for her that through four years he had endured this imprisonment or this martyrdom or this whatever you may be pleased to call it, away off

here on the opposite side of the world from her. She was saving and he was saving, both for a common purpose. Back there at home it cost her little to live, and out here it cost him less. In fact, it cost him almost nothing. Ninety per cent of his pay went into his share of the pool.

Within another year the requisite sum which this pair of canny prudent souls had set as their modest goal would be reached; and then he could bid an everlasting farewell to these hated islands and go sailing home—home to South New Medford and to Miss Hetty Stowe. And then she would surrender the place she had held for so long as the teacher of District School Number Four, to become Mrs. Ethan Allen Pratt, a wife honoured, a helpmate well-beloved.

So to him the coming of the steamer meant more than an orgy of drunken beachcombers and a bustle of life and activity upon the beach; it meant more than a thin-strained taste of contact with a distant world of white men and white men's ways; meant more, even, than letters and papers. To him it was a renewal of the nearing prospect of an eternal departure out of these lands. By the steamer's movements he marked off into spaced intervals the remaining period of his exile, he thought of the passage of time not in terms of days or weeks but in terms of two-month stretches. Six visits more of the ship, or possibly seven, and this drear life would come to an end and another life, the one of his hopes and plans, would begin.

For its next time of coming the boat was due on or about August the first. She failed to come on the first, but on the second, early in the morning, she came nosing into the lagoon. In a canoe with a brown man to paddle him Pratt put off for her. He was alongside by the time her anchor chains had rattled out, and the skipper with his own hands passed down to him a mail bag. He brought it ashore and from it took out his packet of letters and his sheaf of *Daily Republicans*. These he carried to his quarters.

First he read the letters, finding them many fewer in number than was usual. By his private system of chronological accounting there should have been one letter for every day from the eighteenth of March well on into May. But here were but a scant dozen instead of the expected fifty-odd. On the other hand there seemed to be a fairly complete file of the papers, except that about ten or twelve of the earlier-dated numbers were missing. By some freakishness in the handling of the post at this port or that a batch of the older papers and a larger batch of the newer letters had failed of ultimate delivery to the steamer; so he figured it. This thing had happened before, causing a vexatious break in his routine. Plainly it had happened again. Well, away out here off the beat of travel such upsettings must be endured.

He arranged the papers upon their proper shelf and in their proper order; then, as was his

wont, he turned to the letters and read them one by one. To another they might have seemed stiff and precise in their language; almost formal, faintly breathing as they did the restrained affections of a woman no longer young and coming of a breed of women who almost from the cradle are by precept and example taught how to cloak the deeper and the more constant emotions beneath the ice skim of a ladylike reserve. But they satisfied their reader; they were as they always had been and as they always would be. His only complaint, mentally registered, was that the last one should bear the date of March twenty-ninth.

Having read them all he filed them away in a safe place, then brought the topmost copy of his just-received file of newspapers out upon the veranda and sat himself down to read it.

The first column always contained local news. He read of the wand drill given by the graduating class of the South New Medford Girls' High School; of a demonstration of Wheat-Sweet Breakfast Food in the show window of Cody's drug store; of a fire from unknown causes in Lawyer Horace Bartlett's offices upstairs over G. A. R. Hall, damage eighty dollars; of the death of Aunt Priscilla Lyon, aged ninety-two; of a bouncing, ten-pound boy born to Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Purdy, mother and child doing well—all names familiar to him. He came to the department devoted

to weddings. There was but one notice beneath the single-line head; it made a single paragraph.

He read it and as he read the words of it burned into his brain like a fiery acid. He read it, and it ran like this:

"We are informed that a surprise marriage took place this morning at Rutland. In that city Miss Hetty Stowe, of near this place, was united in the holy bonds of wedlock to Mr. Gabriel Eno, of Vergennes. We did not get the name of the officiating minister. The bride is an estimable lady who for years past has taught District School Number Four in the county. We have not the pleasure of the happy bridegroom's acquaintance but assume he is in every way worthy of the lady he has won for a wife. Ye Editor extends congratulations to the happy pair and will print further details when secured."

He read it through again, to the last blurred word. And as he reread a roaring and a crashing filled his ears. It was the castle of his hopes crashing down in ruins. So this, then was why the sequence of letters had been so abruptly broken off. She had lacked the courage to tell him of her faithlessness; she had chosen the course of silence, leaving him to learn of the treachery through other sources. It was cruelty piled upon cruelty compounded.

For such a sorry ending he had cut four years out of his life. For this reward of all his constancy he had endured what had been well-

nigh unendurable—loneliness, homesickness, isolation, discomfort. For this he had kept his body clean and his soul clean where all about him was sloth and slackness. He thought backward upon that which he had undergone; he thought forward upon the dreary purposeless prospect that stretched unendingly before him. Never now could he bring himself to go back to the spot of his shattered dreams. And to him that was the one place in all the world worth going back to.

He put his face down upon his crossed arms, and presently there began to escape from him strangled sobs sounding most grotesquely like some strange mimicry of the name the native girls had for him—"Pooh-pooh, pooh-pooh, pooh-pooh," over and over again repeated. Beyond his doorstep the life of the station hummed and throbbed, quickened into joyous activity by the coming of the steamer. He was not conscious of it. That roaring still was in his ears.

Now between his racking sobs he began to pray aloud a broken prayer. He did not pray for divine forgiveness of the thing he meant to do. By the narrow tenets of his faith his soul, through the deliberate act of his hands, would go forth from the body, doomed to everlasting torment. It did not appear feasible to him that God might understand. The God he believed in was a stern God of punishments, sitting in strict judgment upon mortal trans-

gressions. So he prayed not for mercy but for strength to carry him through that which faced him.

In a cupboard in the inner room was a single-barreled, muzzle-loading fowling piece made at Liege, in Belgium, many years before. His predecessor in the station had left it behind him and Pratt had succeeded to possession of it. He knew how to load and fire and clean it. Occasionally he had used it in shooting at wood pigeons. He went inside and took it from its place and charged it with black powder from an old-fashioned metal powder flask and with heavy shot from a worn shot pouch. For wadding he tore apart the front page of the uppermost copy of the file of *Daily Republicans* lying upon the shelf where he had placed them less than half an hour before.

He rammed the charge home, with wadding between powder and shot, with more wadding on top of the shot. He withdrew the ramrod and cast it aside; he brought the hammer back to full cock and fixed a cap upon the nipple. He stood the gun upright upon the floor and leaned forward, the muzzle against his upper chest, the stock braced against the edge of a crack in the planking. With the great toe of his bare right foot he pressed the trigger.

Two natives, passing, heard the booming report and ran in to see what had caused it. They quickly ran out again and brought white men. After the body had been moved from

where it had fallen but before the scanty personal belongings of the dead man had been sealed up and before the store had been put under lock and key, the white men made search about the place for any farewell message, or lacking that, any physical evidence that might furnish a possible explanation for the cause of the suicide. They found neither message nor clew. In searching about one of them came upon a tattered scrap of newspaper. Its burnt edges and its general singed condition proved that it had been used for wadding. The force of the discharge had blown it out, almost intact, to flutter off into a corner.

Moved by a curiosity natural under the circumstances the finder deciphered the smudged and blackened reading that he found upon the two surfaces of the fragment. On one side appeared part of an advertisement of a merchant tailor; on the other side he made out this, which he read with a casual interest only:

"The Editor regrets exceedingly that in yesterday's issue he was victimised and imposed upon to the extent of printing an erroneous and entirely incorrect item, for which mistake we now hasten to make prompt correction and due amends. Some person unknown, taking advantage of the fact that yesterday was April the first, or All Fools' Day, telephoned to our sanctum the information that Miss Hetty Stowe, the well-known teacher, of near here, had been married yesterday morning at

Rutland to a Mr. Gabriel Eno, of Vergennes. Accepting the report in good faith, this paper printed it in good faith, as an item of news. We now learn that the entire story was untrue, being, not to mince words, a lie manufactured out of the whole cloth. We learn that Miss Stowe knows the gentleman whose name was given as bridegroom but very slightly, having met him but once, as we are now reliably informed. In fact, nothing could be farther from her thoughts than marriage with the gentleman in question, he being considerably her junior in years. The cruelty of the hoax thus perpetrated is increased by the fact that for the past several days Miss Stowe has been confined to the bed of illness, suffering from a sudden and violent attack of fever, which illness has naturally been enhanced by the embarrassing position in which she has been placed through the act of an anonymous practical joker. Such jokes are entirely out of place and cannot be too strongly reprehended. In correcting this falsehood the *Daily Republican* wishes to state that the perpetrator of the same is deserving of severe——"

Here the fragment was torn across.

To the tale there is no moral unless it be an indirect moral to be derived from contemplation of a strange contradiction in our modern life, to wit: That practical burglary is by law sternly discouraged and practical joking is not.

CHAPTER VIII

HOODWINKED

SPY stories rather went out of fashion when the armistice was signed. But this one could not have been told before now, because it happened after the armies had quit fighting and while the Peace Conference was busily engaged in belying its first name. Also, in a strict manner of speaking, it is not a spy story at all.

So far as our purposes are concerned, it began to happen on an afternoon at the end of the month of March of this present year, when J. J. Mullinix, of the Secret Service, called on Miss Mildred Smith, the well-known interior decorator, in her studio apartments on the top floor of one of the best-looking apartment houses in town. For Mullinix there was a short delay downstairs because the doorman, sharp on the lookout to bar pestersome intruders who might annoy the tenants, could not at first make up his mind about Mullinix. In this building there was a rule against solicitors, canvassers, collectors, pedlar men and beggar men; also one against babies, but none against dogs—

excepting dogs above a certain specified size, which—without further description—should identify our building as one standing in what is miscalled the exclusive residential belt of Manhattan Island.

The doorman could not make up his mind offhand whether Mullinix was to be classified as a well-dressed mendicant or an indifferently dressed book agent; he was pretty sure, though, that the stranger fell somewhere within the general ban touching on dubious persons having dubious intentions. This doubt on the part of the doorman was rather a compliment to Mullinix, considering Mullinix's real calling. For Mullinix resembled neither the detective of fiction nor yet the detective of sober fact, which is exactly what the latter usually is—a most sober fact; sober, indeed, often to the point of a serious and dignified impressiveness. This man, though, did not have the eagle-bird eye with which the detective of fiction so often is favoured. He did not have the low flattened arches—frontal or pedal—which frequently distinguish the bona-fide article, who comes from Headquarters with a badge under his left lapel and a cigar under his right moustache to question the suspected hired girl. About him there was nothing mysterious, nothing portentous, nothing inscrutable. He had a face which favourably would have attracted a person taking orders for enlarging family portraits. He had the accommodating manner of one who is willing to go up

when the magician asks for a committee out of the audience to sit on the stage.

Not ten individuals alive knew of his connection with the Secret Service. Probably in all his professional life not ten others—outsiders—had ever appraised him for what he was. His finest asset was a gift of Nature—a sort of protective colouration which enabled him to hide in the background of commonplaceness and do his work with an assurance which would not have been possible had he worn an air of assurance. In short and in fine, Mullinix no more resembled the traditional hawkshaw than Miss Mildred Smith resembled the fashionable conception of a fashionable artist. She never gestured with an up-turned thumb; nor yet made a spy-glass of her cupped hand through which to gaze upon a painting. She had never worn a smock frock in her life.

The smartest of smart tailor-mades was none too smart for her. Nothing was too smart for her, who was so exquisitely fine and well-bred a creature, She was wearing tailor-mades, with a trig hat to match, when she opened the door of her entry hall for Mullinix.

"Just going out, weren't you?" he asked as they shook hands.

"No, just coming in," she said. "I had only just come in when the hall man called me up saying you were downstairs."

"I had trouble getting him to send up my name at all," he said with a half smile on his

face. "He insisted on knowing all about me and my business before he announced me. So I told him everything nearly—except the truth."

"I gathered from his tone he was a bit doubtful about you; but I was glad to get the word. This is the third time you've favoured me with a visit and each of the other times something highly exciting followed. Come in and let me make you a cup of tea, won't you? Is it business that brings you?"

"Yes," he said, "it's business."

They sat down in the big inner studio room; on one side of the fireplace the short, slow-speaking, colourless-looking man who knew the inner blackness of so many whited sepulchres; and on the other side, facing him from across the tea table, this small patrician lady who, having rich kinfolk and friends still richer and a family tree deep-rooted in the most Knickerbockian stratum of the Manhattan social schist, nevertheless chose to earn her own living; and while earning it to find opportunity for service to her Government in a confidential capacity. Not all the volunteers who worked on difficult espionage jobs through the wartime carried cards from the Intelligence Department.

"Yes," he repeated, "it's business—a bigger piece of business and a harder one and probably a more interesting one than the last thing you helped on. If it weren't business I wouldn't be coming here to-day, taking up your time. I know how busy you are with your own affairs."

"Oh, I'm not busy," she said. "This is one of my loafing days. Since lunch time I've been indulging in my favourite passion. I've been prowling through a secondhand bookstore over on Lexington Avenue, picking up bargains. There's the fruit of my shopping."

She indicated a pile of five or six nibbled-looking volumes in dingy covers resting upon one corner of the low mantelshelf.

"Works on interior decorating?" he guessed.

"Goodness, no! Decorating is my business; this is my pleasure. The top one of the heap—the one bound in red—is all about chess."

"Chess! Did anybody ever write a whole book about chess?"

"I believe more books have been written on chess than on any other individual subject in the world, barring Masonry," she said. "And the next one to it—the yellow-bound one—is a book about old English games; not games of chance, but games for holidays and parties. I was glancing through it in my car on the way here from the shop. It's most interesting. Why, some of the games it tells about were played in England before William the Conqueror landed; at least so the author claims. Did you ever hear of a game called Shoe the Wild Mare? It was very popular in Queen Elizabeth's day. The book yonder says so."

"No, I never heard of it. From the name it sounds as though it might be rather a rough game for indoors," commented Mullinix. "For

a busy woman who's made such a big success at her calling, I wonder how you find time to dig into so many miscellaneous subjects."

"I don't call the time wasted," she said. "For example, there's one book in that lot dealing with mushroom culture. It seems there's ever so much to know about mushrooms. Besides, who knows but what some day I might have a wealthy client who would want me to design him a mushroom cellar, combining practicability with the decorative. Then, you see, I would have the knowledge at my finger tips." She smiled at the conceit, busying herself with the tea things.

"Well, I suppose I'm a one-idea-at-a-time sort of person," he said.

"No, you aren't! You only think you are," she amended. "Just now I suppose you are all so wrapped up in the business you mentioned a moment ago that you can't think of anything else."

"That's a fact," he confessed. "And yet all my thinking doesn't seem to have got me anywhere in particular." He paused to glance about. "Where's your maid? Is she, by any chance, where she could overhear us?"

"No, she's out. This is her afternoon off."

"Good! Then I'll start at the beginning and tell you in as few words as possible the whole thing. But before I do begin, let me ask you a question. It may simplify matters. Anyhow it has a bearing on my principal reason for

coming to see you to-day. Isn't Mrs. Howard Hadley-Smith your cousin?"

"Only by marriage. Her husband was my second cousin. He belonged to the branch of the family that owns the hyphen and most of the money. He died six or seven years ago. He was not the most perfect creature in the world, but Claire, his wife—his widow, I mean—is a trump. She's one of the finest women and one of the sanest in New York."

"I'm glad to hear that. Because before we're through with this job—you see I'm assuming in advance that you are going to be willing to help me on it—I say, before we get through it, providing of course we do get through it, it may be necessary to take her into our confidence. That is, if you are sure we can trust absolutely to her discretion."

"We can. But please remember that I don't know what the business is all about."

"I'm coming to that. Oh, by the way, there is one question more: To-morrow night your cousin is giving a costume party or a fancy-dress party of some sort or other, isn't she?"

"Yes; an All Fools' Day party; not a very large one though."

"And you will be going to it, won't you?"

"Yes, indeed! I'm doing the decorating and acting as sort of assistant director of the affair. But what can my cousin and her April Fools' Day party and all that have to do with the matter that brings you here?"

"A good deal, I hope. But I expect I had better go back to the beginning and tell you the tale in some sort of orderly way. Of course I am telling it to you as one responsible representative of our Government to another."

"I understand. But go ahead, won't you? My curiosity is increasing by the moment."

"Well then, here it is: Six days ago there arrived from the conference at Versailles a high army officer, acting for this occasion as a confidential messenger of the Administration. He brought with him a certain communication—a single small sheet or strip of parchment paper containing about twelve or fifteen typewritten lines. But those few lines were about as important and, under certain circumstances, as dangerous a collection of typewritten lines as it is possible to conceive of."

"Weren't they in code?"

"Naturally. But the signature was not. The signature was in the handwriting of the man—let us say the personage—who dictated the wording of the dispatch. You would know that handwriting if you saw it. Nearly every man, woman and child in this country who can read would know it and would recognise it at a glance. Even between us, I take it that there is no need of mentioning the name."

"No. Please go on. The thing has a thrilling sound already."

"That communication dealt directly with perhaps the most important single issue now in

controversy at the Peace Conference—a phase of the Asiatic muddle. In fact, it was an outline of the private agreement that has been reached as between our envoys and the envoys representing sundry friendly powers in regard to this particular question. If it should fall into the hands of a certain other power—and be translated—the entire negotiation would be jeopardised. Almost inevitably at least one Oriental nation would withdraw from the conference. The future of the great thing for which our own statesmen and the statesmen of some of the countries provisionally leagued together with us are working—well, that result, to put the thing mildly, would be jeopardised. The very least that could happen would be that four governments would be tremendously embarrassed.

"Indeed it is hard offhand to calculate the possibilities of disaster, but this much is quite sure: Our enemy—and Germany is as much our enemy now as she was during active hostilities—would almost inevitably succeed in the very thing she has been plotting to bring about, which is the sowing of discord among the Allies, not to mention the increase of a racial distrust and a racial antagonism which exist in certain quarters, and, on top of all that, the widening and deepening of a problem which already has been sufficiently difficult and delicate."

"I see. Well?"

"Well, naturally everything possible was

done at Washington to safeguard a dispatch of such tremendous importance. No copies of the communication were made. The original was put in a place where it was presumed to be absolutely safe. But within forty-eight hours it disappeared from the place where it had been put."

"How did it disappear? Is that known?"

"It was stolen. A government clerk named Westerfeltner, a man who held a place of trust and confidence, was the man who stole it. For it he was offered a sum of money which would make him independent for life, and under the temptation he weakened and he stole it. But first he stole the key to the cipher, which would make it possible for any-one having both the key and the message to decode the message. Once this is done the damage is done, for the signature is ample proof of the validity of the document. That is the one thing above all others we are trying to prevent now."

"But why couldn't the thief have decoded the dispatch?"

"He might have, excepting for two things. In the first place his principal, the man who corrupted him to betray his honour and incidentally to betray his Government, would not trust him to do this. The head plotter demanded the original paper. In the second place an interval of a day and a half elapsed between the theft of the code and the theft of the dispatch. Before the thief secured the dis-

patch the key had already passed out of his possession."

"How do you know these things with such certainty?"

"Because Westerfeltner has confessed. He confessed to me at three o'clock yesterday morning after the thefts had practically been traced to his door. He made a clean breast of it all right enough. The high points of his confession have all been verified. I am sure that he was honest with me. Fear and remorse together made him honest. At present he is—well, let's call it sequestered. No outsider knows he is now under arrest; or perhaps I should say in custody. No interested party is likely to feel concern regarding his whereabouts, because so far as he was concerned the crooked contract had been carried out and completed before he actually fell under suspicion."

"Meaning by that, what?"

"Meaning just this: On the night he secured possession of the key he handed it over to his principal, who still has it unless he has destroyed it. It is fair to assume that this other man, being a code expert, already has memorised the key so that he can read the dispatch almost offhand. At least that is the assumption upon which I am going."

"All this happened in Washington, I suppose?"

"Yes, in Washington. The original understanding was that as soon as possible after

stealing the dispatch Westerfeltner would turn it over to the other man. But something—we don't know yet just what—frightened the master crook out of town. With the job only partially accomplished he left Washington and came to New York. But before leaving he gave to Westerfeltner explicit instructions for the delivery of the dispatch—when he had succeeded in getting his hands on it—to a third party, a special go-between, with whom Westerfeltner was to communicate by telephone.

"Late the next day Westerfeltner did succeed in getting his hands on the document. That same evening, in accordance with his instructions, he called up from his house a certain number. He had been told to call this number exactly at eight o'clock and to ask for Mrs. Williams. Without delay he got Mrs. Williams on the wire. Over the wire a woman's voice told him to meet her at the McPherson Statue in McPherson Square at eleven-fifteen o'clock that night. He was there at the appointed hour, waiting. According to what he tells me, almost precisely on the minute a woman, wearing plain dark clothes and heavily veiled, came walking along the path that leads to the statue from Fifteenth Street. It was dark there, anyhow, and for obvious reasons both the conspirators kept themselves well shielded in the shadows.

"As she came up and saw him waiting there, she uttered the catchwords which made him

know her for the right person. The words were simple enough. She merely said to him 'Did you go to the pawnshop?' He answered 'Yes, I went there and I got your keepsake.' 'Thank you,' she answered, 'then give it to me.' 'Here it is, safe and sound,' he replied and passed to her the paper, which was wadded up, he says, in a pellet about the size of a hazelnut.

"Up to this point the pair had been speaking in accordance with a sort of memorised ritual, each knowing from the instructions given to both by their employer what the other would say. But before they parted they exchanged a few other words. Westerfeltner tells me that, having his own safety in mind as well as a natural anxiety for the safe delivery of the paper to its real purchaser, he said to her: 'I hope you understand that you should keep this thing in your possession for every minute of the time until you hand it over to our mutual friend.'

"As he recalls her answer, as nearly as possible in the words she used, she said: 'Certainly I do. It will be kept on my person where I can put my hand on it, but where no one else can see it and where no one else will ever suspect it of being.' Then she asked him: 'Was there anything else you wanted to say to me?' He told her there was nothing else and she said good night to him and turned and walked away in the direction from which she had come. He waited a minute or so and then

walked off, leaving the square on the opposite side—the Vermont Avenue side. He went directly home and went to bed.

"He is unmarried and lives alone, taking his luncheons and dinners out, but preparing his own breakfasts in his rooms. At three o'clock in the morning he was in bed and asleep when I rang his doorbell. In his night clothes he got up and let me in; and as soon as I was in I accused him. As a matter of fact the double theft had been discovered the evening before, but unfortunately by then several hours had elapsed from the time the dispatch was taken, and already, as you know, the dispatch had changed hands.

"Within an hour after the discovery of the loss I had been set to work on the job. At once suspicion fell upon three men, one after the other. It didn't take very long to convince me that two of these men were innocent. So these two having been eliminated by deductive processes, I personally went after the third man, who was this Westerfeltner. The moment I walked in on him I was convinced from his behaviour that I had made no mistake. So I took a chance. I charged him point-blank with being the thief. Almost immediately he weakened. His denials turned to admissions. As a conspirator Westerfeltner is a lame duck. I only wish I had started after him three or four hours earlier than I did; if only I had done so I'm satisfied the paper would be back where it

belongs and no damage done. Well, anyhow, if I am one to judge, he told me everything frankly and held back nothing."

"Well, then, who is the woman in the case?"

"He didn't know. To his best knowledge he had never seen her before that night. He is sure that he had never heard her voice before. Really, all he does know about her is that she is a small, slender woman with rather quick, decided movements and that her voice is that of a refined person. He is sure she is a young woman, but he can furnish no better description of her than this. He claims he was very nervous at the time of their meeting. I figure he was downright excited, filled as he was with guilty apprehensions, and no doubt because of his excitement he took less notice of her than he otherwise might. Besides, you must remember that the place of rendezvous was a fairly dark spot on rather a dark night."

"He has absolutely no idea of his own, then, as to the identity of Mrs. Williams?"

"He hasn't; but I have. The telephone number which figures in the case is the number of a pay station in an all-night drug store in Washington. Westerfeltner freely gave me the number. Both the proprietor of this drug store and his clerk remember that night before last, shortly before eight o'clock, a rather small, slight woman wearing a black street costume with a dark veil over her face came into the place and said she was expecting a telephone

call for Mrs. Williams. Within two or three minutes the bell rang and the clerk answered and somebody asked for Mrs. Williams. The woman entered the booth, came out almost immediately, and went away. All that the drugstore man and his clerk remember about her is that she was a young woman, plainly dressed but well-groomed. The druggist is positive she had dark hair; the clerk is inclined to think her hair was a deep reddish-brown. Neither of them saw her face; neither of them remarked anything unusual about her. To them she was merely a woman who came in to keep a telephone engagement, and having kept it went away again. So, having run into a blind alley at that end of the case, I started in at the other end of it to find the one lady to whom naturally the chief conspirator would turn for help in the situation that confronted him when he ran away from Washington. And I found her—both of her in fact."

"Both of her! Then there are two women involved?"

"No, only one; but which one of two suspects she is I can't for the life of me decide. I know who she is, and yet I don't know. I'll come to that part of it in a minute or two. I haven't told you the name of the head devil of the whole intrigue yet, have I? You've met him, I imagine. At any rate you surely have heard of him.

"You know him, or else you surely know of

him, as the Hon. Sidney Bertram Goldsborough, of London, England, and Shanghai, China."

"Goodness gracious me!" In her astonishment Miss Smith had recourse to an essentially feminine exclamation. "Why, that does bring it close to home! Why, he is among the persons invited to my cousin's house to-morrow night. I remember seeing his name on the invitation list. That's why you asked me about her party a while ago. My cousin met him somewhere and liked him. I've never seen him, but I've heard about him. A big mining engineer, isn't he?"

"A big international crook, posing as a mining engineer and ostensibly in this country to finance some important Korean concessions—that's what he is. His real name is Geltmann. Here's his pedigree in a nutshell: Born in Russia of mixed German and Swiss parentage. Educated in England, where he acquired his accent and the monocle habit. Perfected himself in scoundrelism in the competent finishing schools of the Far East. Speaks half a dozen languages, including Chinese and Japanese. Carries gilt-edged credentials made in the Orient. That, briefly, is your Hon. Mr. Sidney Bertram Goldsborough, when you undress him. He was officially suspected of being something other than what he claimed to be, even before Westerfeltner divulged his name. In fact, he fell under suspicion shortly after he turned up in Paris in January of this year, he having ob-

tained a passport for France on the strength of his credentials and on the representation that he wanted to go abroad to interest European financiers in that high-sounding Korean development scheme of his—which, by the way, is purely imaginary. He hung about Paris for three months. How he found out about the document which the army officer was bringing home, and how he found out that the officer—in order to save time—would travel on a French liner instead of on a transport, are details that are yet to be cleared up by our people on the other side. There has been no time yet of course to take up the chase over there in Paris. But obviously there must have been a leak somewhere. Either some one abroad was in collusion with him or perhaps indiscreetness rather than guilty connivance was responsible for his learning what he did learn. As to that, I can't say.

"But the point remains that Geltmann sailed on the same ship that brought the army officer. Evidently he hoped to get possession of the paper the officer carried on the way over. Failing there, he tried other means. He followed the officer down to Washington, seduced Westerfeltner by the promise of a fat bribe, and then, just when his scheme was about to succeed, became frightened and returned to New York, trusting to a woman confederate to deliver the paper to him here. And now he's here, awaiting her arrival, and from all the

evidence available he expects to get it from her to-morrow night at your cousin's party."

"Then the woman is to be there too?" Miss Smith's eyes were stretched wide.

"She certainly is."

"And who is she—or, rather, who do you think she is?"

"Miss Smith, prepare for a shock. Either that woman is Mme. Josephine Ybanca, the wife of the famous South American diplomat, or else she is Miss Evelyn Ballister, sister of United States Senator Hector Ballister. And I am pretty sure that you must know both of them."

"I do! I do! I know Miss Ballister fairly well, and I have met Madame Ybanca twice—once here in New York, once at Washington. And let me say now, that at first blush I do not find it in my heart to suspect either of them of deliberate wrongdoing. I don't think they are that sort."

"I don't wonder you say that," answered Mullinix. "Also I think I know you well enough to feel sure that the fact that both of them are to be guests of your cousin, Mrs. Hadley-Smith, to-morrow night has no influence upon you in forming your judgments of these two young women."

"I know Miss Ballister has been invited and has accepted. But I think you must be wrong when you say Madame Ybanca is also expected."

"When was the last time you saw your cousin?"

"The day before yesterday, I think it was, but only for a few minutes."

"Well, yesterday she sent a telegram to Madame Ybanca saying she understood Madame Ybanca would be coming up from Washington this week and asking her to waive formality and come to the party."

"You say my cousin sent such a wire?"

"I read the telegram. Likewise I read Madame Ybanca's reply, filed at half after six o'clock yesterday evening, accepting the invitation."

"But surely"—and now there was mounting incredulity and indignation in Miss Smith's tone—"but surely no one dares to assert that my cousin is conniving at anything improper?"

"Certainly not! If I thought she was doing anything wrong I would hardly be asking you to help trap her, would I? Didn't I tell you that we might even have to enlist your cousin's co-operation? But I imagine, when you make inquiry, as of course you will do at once, you'll find that since you saw your cousin she has seen Goldsborough, or Geltmann—to give him his real name—and that he asked her to send the wire to Madame Ybanca."

"That being assumed as correct, the weight of the proof would seem to press upon the madame rather than upon Miss Ballister, wouldn't it?"

"Frankly I don't know. At times to-day, coming up here on the train, I have thought she must be the guilty one, and at times I have felt sure that she was not. But this much I do know: One of those two ladies is absolutely innocent of any wrongdoing, and the other one—pardon my language—is as guilty as hell. But perhaps it is only fair to both that you should suspend judgment altogether until I have finished telling you the whole business, as far as I know it.

"Let us go back a bit. Half an hour after I had heard Westerfeltner's confession and fifteen minutes after I had seen the druggist and his clerk, the entire machinery of our branch of the service had been set in motion to find out what women in Washington were friends of Geltmann. For Geltmann spent most of last fall in Washington. Now while in Washington he was noticeably attentive to just two women—Miss Ballister and Madame Ybanca. Now mark a lengthening of the parallel: Both of them are small women; both of them are slender; both are young, and both of course have refined voices. Neither speaks with any special accent, for the madame, though married to a Latin, is an American woman. She has black hair, while Miss Ballister's hair is a golden red-brown. So far, you see, the vague description furnished by the three men who spoke to the mythical Mrs. Williams might apply to either."

"Then which of the two is supposed to have been most attracted to Geltmann, as you call him?"

Mullinix smiled a trifle.

"I was rather expecting that question would come along about here," he said. "I only wish I could tell you; it might simplify matters. But so far as the available evidence points, there is nothing to indicate that either of them really cared for him or he for either of them. The attentions which he paid them both, impartially, were those which a man might pay to any woman, whether she was married or unmarried, without creating gossip. There is no suggestion here of a dirty scandal. The woman who is serving Geltmann's ends is doing it, not for love of him and not even because she is fascinated by him, but for money. She has agreed to sell out her country, the land she was born in, for hire. I'm sure of that much."

"Then which of them is presumed to be in pressing need of funds?"

"Again you score. I was expecting that question too. As a matter of fact both of them need money. Madame Ybanca belongs to a bridge-playing set—a group of men and women who play for high stakes. She has been a heavy loser and her husband, unlike many politically prominent South Americans, is not a fabulously wealthy man. I doubt whether he would be called wealthy at all, either by the standards of his own people or of ours. As for

Miss Ballister, I have reports which prove she has no source of income except a modest allowance from her brother, the senator, who is in moderate circumstances only; yet it is common talk about Washington that she is extravagant beyond her means. She owes considerable sums to tradesmen for frocks and furs, millinery, jewelry and the like. It is fair to assume that she is harassed by her debts. On the other hand, Madame Ybanca undoubtedly wants funds with which to meet her losses at bridge. So the presumption in this direction runs as strongly against one as against the other."

"Well then, barring these slight clews—which to my way of thinking really aren't clews at all—and when you have eliminated the circumstance of Goldsborough's having paid perfectly proper attentions to both of them simultaneously, what is there to justify the belief that one or the other must be guilty?"

Miss Smith's voice still carried a suggestion of scepticism.

"I'm coming to that. Of course their positions being what they are, neither I nor any other Secret Service operative would dare question either one or both of them. On a mere hazard you cannot go to the beautiful young wife of the distinguished representative of a friendly nation, and a woman besides of irreproachable character, and accuse her of being in the pay of an international crook. You cannot do this any more than you could

attempt a similar liberty with regard to an equally beautiful woman of equally good repute who happens to be a prominent figure in the most exclusive circles of this country and the favourite sister of a leader on the Administration side in the United States Senate. Of course since the developments began to focus suspicion upon them, they have been watched. Yesterday at church Miss Ballister's wrist bag was picked. Along with things of no apparent significance, it contained a note received by her the day before from Goldsborough—Geltmann rather—reminding her that they were to meet to-morrow night at your cousin's party. Later in the afternoon Madame Ybanca received a telegram and sent an answer, as I have told you; a telegram inviting her to the very same party. Putting two and two together, I think I see Geltmann's hand showing. Having put two and two together, I came to New York to get in touch with you and to enlist your help."

"But why me?"

"Why not you? I remembered that Mrs. Hadley-Smith was related to you. I felt pretty sure that you would be going to her party. And I am morally sure that at the party Geltmann means to meet his confederate —Miss Ballister or Madame Ybanca, as the case may be—and to receive from her the bit of paper that means so much to him and to those he is serving in the capacity of a paid agent. It will be easy enough to do the thing

there; whereas a meeting in any other place, public or private, might be dangerous for both of them.

"Miss Ballister will be coming over from Washington to-morrow. She has a chair-car reservation on the Pennsylvania train leaving there at ten o'clock in the morning. I don't know what train Madame Ybanca will take, but the news will be coming to me by wire before she is aboard the train. Each one of them is now being shadowed; each one of them will be shadowed for every moment while she is on her way and during her stay here; and of course Geltmann cannot stir a step outside his suite at the Hotel Atminster, on Fortieth Street, without being under observation. He didn't know it, but he was under observation when he woke up yesterday morning.

"But I think these precautions are of mighty little value; I do not expect any important result from them. On the other hand, I am convinced that the transfer of the dispatch will be attempted under your cousin's roof. I do not need to tell you why Geltmann should have sought to insure the presence of both women here at one time. He is smart enough; he knows that in this case there is an added element of safety for him in numbers—that it is better to have both present. Then unwittingly the innocent one will serve as a cover for the guilty one. I think he figures that should discovery of the theft come soon—he not knowing

it already has come—then in such case there will be a divided trail for us to follow, one end pointing toward Miss Ballister and the other toward the madame. Or, at least, so I diagnose his mental processes.

"If I have diagnosed them correctly, the big part of the job, Miss Smith, is now up to you. We figure from what she told Westerfeltner that the paper will be concealed on the person of the woman we are after—in her hair perhaps, or in her bosom; possibly in that favourite cache of a woman—her stocking. At any rate she will have it hidden about her; that much we may count on for a certainty. And so it must be your task to prevent that paper from changing hands; better still, to get it into your own possession before it possibly can come under Geltmann's eyes even for a moment. But there must be no scene, no violence used, no scandal; above all things there must be no publicity. Publicity is to be dreaded almost as much as the actual transfer.

"For my part I can promise you this: I shall be in the house of your cousin to-morrow night, if you want me to be there. That detail we can arrange through her: but naturally I must stay out of sight. You must do your work practically unaided. I guarantee though to insure you plenty of time in which to do it. Geltmann will not reach the party until later than he expects. The gentleman will be delayed by one or a number of annoying but seemingly

unavoidable accidents. Beyond these points I have to confess myself helpless. After those two women pass inside Mrs. Hadley-Smith's front door the real job is in your hands. You must find who has the paper and you must get it away from its present custodian without making threats, without using force—in short, without doing anything to rouse the suspicions beforehand of the person we are after, or to make the innocent woman aware that she is under scrutiny.

"Above all, nothing must occur to make any of the other guests realise that anything unusual is afoot. For that would mean talk on the outside, and talk on the outside means sensational stories in the newspapers. You can make no mistake, and yet for the life of me I cannot see how you are going to guard against making them. Everything depends on you, and that everything means a very great deal to our country. Yes, everything depends on you, because I am at the end of my rope."

He finished and sat back in his chair, eyeing her face. Her expression gave him no clew to any conclusions she might have reached.

"I'll do my best," she said simply, "but I must have full authority to do it in my own way."

"Agreed. I'm not asking anything else from you."

In a study she rose and went to the mantelpiece and took one book from the heap of books

there. She opened it and glanced abstractedly through the leaves as they flittered under her fingers.

With her eyes on the page headings she said to him: "I quarrel with one of your premises."

"Which one?"

"The one that the woman we want will have the paper hidden in her hair or in her corsage or possibly in her stocking."

"Well, I couldn't think of any other likely place in which she might hide it. She wouldn't have it in a pocket, would she? Women don't have pockets in their party frocks, do they?"

Disregarding his questions she asked one herself:

"You say it is a small strip of paper, and that probably it is rolled up into a wad about the size of a hazelnut?"

"It was rolled up so when Westerfeltner parted from it—that's all I can tell you. Why do you ask that?"

"Oh, it doesn't particularly matter. I merely was thinking of various possibilities and contingencies."

Apparently she now had found the place in the book which, more or less mechanically, she had been seeking. She turned down the upper corner of a certain page for a marker and closed the book.

"Well, in any event," she said, "I must get to work. I think I shall begin by calling up my cousin to tell her, among other things, that her

party may have some rather unique features that she had not included in her program. And where can I reach you by telephone or by messenger—say, in an hour from now?"

A number of small things, seemingly in no wise related to the main issue, occurred that evening and on the following morning. In the evening, for example, Mrs. Hadley-Smith revised the schedule of amusements she had planned for her All Fools' party, incorporating some entirely new notions into the original scheme. In the morning Miss Mildred Smith visited the handkerchief counter of a leading department store, where she made selections and purchases from the stocks, going thence to a shop dealing in harness and leather goods. Here she gave a special commission for immediate execution.

Toward dusk of the evening of April first a smallish unobtrusive-looking citizen procured admittance to Mrs. Hadley-Smith's home, on East Sixty-third Street just off Fifth Avenue. With the air of a man having business on the premises he walked through the front door along with a group of helpers from the caterer's. Once inside, he sent a name by the butler to Mrs. Hadley-Smith, who apparently awaited such word, for promptly she came downstairs and personally escorted the man to a small study at the back of the first floor; wherein, having been left alone, he first locked the door leading to the hall and drew the curtains of the

windows giving upon a rear courtyard, and proceeded to make himself quite at home.

He ate a cold supper which he found spread upon a table and after that he used the telephone rather extensively. This done, he lit a cigar and stretched himself upon a sofa, smoking away with the air of a man who has finished his share of a given undertaking and may take his ease until the time arrives for renewed action upon his part. Along toward nine-thirty o'clock, when he had smoked his third cigar, there came a soft knock thrice repeated upon the door, whereupon he rose and unlocked the door, but without opening it to see who might be outside he went back to his couch, lay down and lit a fourth cigar. For the next little while we may leave him there to his comfortable solitude and his smoke haze.

Meanwhile the Hon. Sidney Bertram Goldsborough, so called and so registered at the Hotel Atminster, grew decidedly peevish over the unaccountable failure of his order to arrive from a theatrical costumer's, where he had selected it some three days earlier. He was morally sure it had been sent hours earlier by special messenger from the costume shop. In answer to his vexed inquiries the parcels department of the hotel was equally sure that no box or package consigned to Mr. Goldsborough had been received. Finally, after ten o'clock, the missing costume was brought to the gentleman's door with a message of profound regret from

the assistant manager, who expressed sorrow that through the stupidity of some member or members of his force a valued guest had been inconvenienced. Hastily slipping into the costume and putting a light overcoat on over it Mr. Goldsborough started in a taxicab up Fifth Avenue. But at Forty-eighth Street a government mail van, issuing suddenly out of the sideway, smashed squarely into the side of the taxicab bearing him, with the result that the taxi lost a wheel and Mr. Goldsborough lost another half hour.

This second delay was due to the fact that his presence upon the spot was required by a plain-clothes man who took over the investigation of the collision from the patrolman on the post. To Mr. Goldsborough, inwardly fuming but outwardly calm and indifferent, it seemed that the plain-clothes person took an unreasonably long time for his inquiries touching on the accident. At length, with apologies for detaining him, the headquarters man—now suddenly become accommodating where before he had been officially exact and painstaking in his inquisition into causes and circumstances—personally hailed another taxicab for Mr. Goldsborough and sent him upon his way.

But, Mr. Goldsborough's chapter of petty troubles was not yet ended; for the driver of the second taxi stupidly drove to the wrong address, landing his fare at a house on West Sixty-third Street, clear across Central Park and nearly

halfway across town from Mrs. Hadley-Smith's home. So, what with first one thing and then another, eleven o'clock had come and gone before the indignant passenger finally was set down at his proper destination.

We go back to nine-thirty, which was the hour set and appointed for inaugurating the All Fools' Day party. Nine-thirty being the hour, very few of the prospective celebrants arrived before ten. But by ten, or a little later, most of them were assembled in the big twin drawing-rooms on the first floor of the Hadley-Smith establishment. These two rooms, with the study behind them and the wide reception hall that ran alongside them, took up the most of the first-floor ground space of the town house. As the first arrivals noted, they had been stripped of furniture for dancing. One room was quite empty, save for decorations; the other contained only a table piled with favours. Even the chairs had been removed, leaving clear spaces along the walls.

It was not such a very large party as parties go, for Mrs. Hadley-Smith had a reputation for doing her entertaining on a small but an exceedingly smart scale. All told, there were not more than fifty on hand—and accounted for—by ten o'clock. A good many had come in costume—as zanies, Pantaloons, witches, Pierrots, Columbines, clowns and simples. For those who wore evening dress the hostess had provided a store of dunce caps and dominos of gay colours.

Nearly everybody present already knew nearly everybody else. There were only five or six guests from out of town, and of these Mme. Josephine Ybanca, wife of the great South American diplomat, and Miss Evelyn Ballister, sister of the distinguished Western statesman, were by odds the handsomest. Of women there were more than men; there usually are more women than men in evidence at such affairs.

At about ten o'clock, Mrs. Hadley-Smith stood out on the floor under the arch connecting but not exactly separating the joined rooms.

"Listen, please, everybody!" she called, and the motley company, obeying the summons, clustered about her. "The musicians won't be here until midnight. After they have come and after we've had supper there will be dancing. But until midnight we are going to play games—old games, such as I'm told they played in England two hundred years ago on May Day and on All Fools' Day and on Halloween. There'll be no servants about and no one to bother us and we'll have these rooms to ourselves to do just as we please in."

A babble of politely enthusiastic exclamations rose. The good-looking widow could always be depended upon to provide something unusual when she entertained.

"I've asked my cousin, Mildred, to take charge of this part of our party," went on the hostess. "She has been studying up on the

subject, I believe." She looked about her. "Oh, Mildred, where are you?"

"Here," answered Miss Smith, emerging from a corner, pretty Madame Ybanca coming with her. "Madame Ybanca has on such marvellous, fascinating old jewelry to-night; I was just admiring it. Are you ready to start?"

"Quite ready, if you are."

Crossing to the one table in sight Miss Smith took the party-coloured cover from a big square cardboard box. Seemingly the box was filled to the top with black silk handkerchiefs; thick, heavy black handkerchiefs they were.

"As a beginning," she announced, "we are going to play a new kind of Blind Man's Buff. That is to say, it may be new to us, though some of our remote ancestors no doubt played it a century or so back. In the game we played as children one person was blindfolded and was spun about three times and then had to lay hands upon one of the others, all of whom were duty bound to stand where they were, without moving or speaking—but you remember, I'm sure, all of you? In this version the rules are different, as you'll see.

"First we'll draw lots to see who's going to be It, as we used to say when we were kiddies. Wait a minute though—it will take too long to choose from among so many. I think I'll save time by finding a victim in this little crowd here." And she indicated ten or twelve who chanced to be clustered at her right.

"You, Mr. Polk, and you, Miss Vane, and you and you and you—and, oh yes, I'll take in Madame Ybanca too; she makes an even dozen. I shan't include myself, because I rather think I had better act as referee and general factotum until you learn the game."

The chosen group faced her while the others pressed up in anticipation. From a pocket in her red-and-white clown's blouse Miss Smith produced a sheaf of folded bits of tissue paper.

"One of these papers bears a number," she went on, as she made a selection of twelve slips from the handful. "All the others are blank. I know which one is marked, but no one else does. Now then, take a slip, each of you. The person who draws the numbered slip is It."

In mock solemnity each of the selected twelve in turn drew from between Miss Smith's fingers a colored scrap.

"Mine's a blank," called out Miss Vane, opening her bit of paper.

"Mine too."

"And mine."

"And mine is."

"Who has it, then?"

"I seem to have drawn the fatal number," said Madame Ybanca, holding up her slip for all to see the markings on it.

"So you have," agreed Miss Smith. "Now then, everybody pick out a black handkerchief from this box—they're all exactly alike. Not you, though, madame. I'll have to prepare

you for your rôle myself." So saying, she took one of the handkerchiefs and folded it into a long flat strip.

"Now, madame, please put your arms back of you—so! You see, I'm going to tie your hands behind your back."

"Oh, does everybody have to be tied?" demanded Miss Vane.

"No, but everybody excepting the madame must be blindfolded," stated Miss Smith. "I'll explain in just one minute when I'm done with the madame here." With fast-moving fingers she firmly drew the handkerchief about the young matron's crossed wrists. Madame Ybanca uttered a sharp little "Ouch!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said Miss Smith. "Am I binding you too tightly?"

"No, not that; but I think you are making one of my bracelets press into my flesh. It's such a thick cumbersome thing anyway."

"Shall I slip it farther up your arm?" asked Miss Smith.

"No, take it off entirely, won't you, and keep it for me? It fastens with a little clasp."

So Miss Smith undid the bracelet, which was a band of curiously chased heavy gold, studded with big bosses containing blue stones, and dropped it into her handy blouse pocket.

Then swiftly she finished her task of knotting the handkerchief ends and Madame Ybanca, very securely bound, stood forth in the midst of a laughing ring, making a pretty and appeal-

ing picture, her face slightly flushed by embarrassment.

"One thing more for your adornment and you'll be ready," promised Miss Smith.

Burrowing beneath the remaining handkerchiefs in the box she produced a collarlike device of soft russet leather, all hung with fat silver sleigh bells which, being loosely sewed to the fabric by means of twisted wire threads, jingled constantly and busily. The slightest movement set the wires to quivering like antennæ and the bells to making music. Miss Smith lifted the leather circlet down over Madame Ybanca's head so that it rested upon her shoulders, looping across just below the base of the throat.

"Take a step forward," she bade the madame, and as the latter obeyed, all the bells tinkled together with a constant merry clamour.

"Behold!" said Miss Smith. "The lady of the bells is caparisoned for her part. Now then, let each person blindfold his or her eyes with the handkerchief you have; but take care that you are well blinded.

"Oh, Miss Ballister, let me adjust your handkerchief, won't you? I'm afraid you might disarrange that lovely hair ornament of yours unless you have help. There! How's that! Can you see anything at all? How many fingers do I hold up?"

"Oh, I'm utterly in the dark," said Miss Ballister. "I can't see a thing."

"Are you all hooded?" called Miss Smith.

A chorus of assents went up.

"Good! Then listen a moment: It will be Madame Ybanca's task to catch hold of some one of you with her hands fastened as they are behind her. It is your task to keep out of her way; the bells are to warn you of her approach. Whoever is caught takes her place and becomes It.

Ready—go!"

Standing a moment as though planning a campaign Madame Ybanca made a quick dash toward where the others were grouped the thickest. But her bells betrayed her. From before her they scattered and broke apart, stumbling, groping with outstretched hands to find the wall, jostling into one another, caroming off again, whooping with laughter. Fast as Madame Ybanca advanced, the rest all managed to evade her. She halted, laughing in admission of the handicap upon her, when before she had been so confident of a capture; then, changing her tactics, she undertook to stalk down some member of the blindfolded flock by stealthy, gentle forward steps. But softly though she might advance, the telltale bells gave ample notice of her whereabouts, and the troop fled. Moreover, even when she succeeded—as she soon did—in herding someone into a corner, the prospective victim, a man, managed to slip past her out of danger, being favoured by the fact that to grasp him with one

of her fettered hands she must turn entirely about. So he was able to wriggle out of peril and her clutching fingers closed only on empty air.

"It's not so easy as it seemed," she confessed.

"Keep trying," counselled the referee, keeping pace with her. Miss Smith's eyes were darting everywhere at once, watching the hooded figures keenly, as though to detect any who might seek to cheat by lifting his or her mufflings. "You're sure to catch somebody presently. They can't dodge you every time, you know."

So Madame Ybanca tried again. Ahead of her the fugitives stampeded, milling about in uncertain circles, gliding past her along the walls, fleeing from one room to the other and back again—singly, by pairs and threes. They touched her often, but by reason of her hampered state she never could touch, with her hands, any of them in their flight.

As Mrs. Hadley-Smith, fleeing alone, came through the doorway with both her arms outstretched to fend off possible collisions, a sharp low whisper spoken right alongside of her made her halt. The whisperer was her cousin. Unobserved by the madame and unheard by any one else, Miss Smith spoke a word or two in her cousin's ear. The next instant almost Mrs. Hadley-Smith, apparently becoming confused as to the direction from which the sounds of

bells approached, hesitated in indecision and was fairly trapped by the pursuer.

"Who's caught? Who's caught?" cried several together.

"You're not supposed to know—that makes the fun all the better," cried Miss Smith. "You may halt a bit to get your breath, but nobody is to touch his or her blindfold."

"I'm sure you took pity on me and let me tag you," said Madame Ybanca in an undertone to her victim as Miss Smith, deftly freeing the younger woman's hands, proceeded to bind the hostess' wrists at her back.

"Not at all," replied Mrs. Hadley-Smith, also under her breath. "I was stupid or awkward or perhaps both at once—that's all."

A moment later when the collar of bells had been shifted to the new wearer's shoulders, the madame, covering up her own eyes, moved away to join the ranks of the blindfolded.

Before taking up the chase Mrs. Hadley-Smith cast a quick look toward her cousin and the cousin replied with a nod and a significant glance toward a certain quarter of the same room in which they stood. Raising her eyebrows to show she understood the widow moved toward the place that had been indicated. From her path the gaily clad figures retreated, eddying and tacking in uncertain flight away from the jingle of the bells.

Had any third person there had the use of his or her eyes that person would have witnessed

now a strange bit of byplay and—given a fair share of perception—would have realised that something more important than a petty triumph in the playing of a game was afoot. Having vision this third person would have seen how Mrs. Hadley-Smith, disregarding easier chances to make a capture, strove with all her power to touch one particular chosen quarry; would have seen how twice, by a quick twist of a graceful young body, the hunted one eluded those two tied hands outthrust to seize her; how at the third time of trying the huntress scored a victory and laid detaining hold upon a fold of the fugitive's costume; and how at this Miss Smith, so eagerly watching the chase, gave a gesture of assent and satisfaction over a thing accomplished, as she hurried toward the pair of them to render her self-appointed service upon the winner and the loser.

But having for the moment no eyes with which to see, no third person there witnessed these little interludes of stratagem and design, though it was by no means hard for them to sense that again a coup had been scored. What they did not know was that the newest victim was Evelyn Ballister.

"Oh, somebody else has been nabbed! Goody! Goody! I'm glad I got away," shouted Miss Vane, who was by nature exuberant and of a high spirit. "I wonder who it is now?" She threw back her head, endeavouring to peep out along her tilted nose. "I hope it's a man

this time. It's more exciting—being pursued by a man."

"Don't forget—no one is to look," warned Miss Smith as keeper of the rules. "It would spoil the sport if you knew who'll be pursuing you next."

Already she had stripped the blindfold from about Miss Ballister's head and with a quick jerk at the master knot had freed her cousin from bondage. With flirting motions she twisted the folded kerchief into a rope. Practice in the work seemed to have given to her added deftness and speed, for in no more time than it takes to tell of it she had drawn Miss Ballister's smooth arms round behind their owner's back and was busied at the next step of her offices. Almost it seemed the girl surrendered reluctantly, as though she were loath to go through with the rôle that had fallen to her by penalty of being tagged. But if Miss Smith felt unwillingness in the sudden rebellious tensing of the limbs she touched, the only response on her part was an added quickness in her fingers as she placed one veined wrist upon the other and with double wraps made them snugly fast.

"It hurts—it pinches! You've bound me too tightly," murmured the prisoner, as involuntarily she strained against the pull of the trussings.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," whispered Miss Smith. "I'll ease you in just a second." But despite

her promise she made no immediate move to do so. Instead she concerned herself with lifting the collaret of bells off over Mrs. Hadley-Smith's head and bestowing it upon the rounded shoulders of the girl. As she brought the jingling harness down in its place her hands lingered for one fleeting space where a heavy, quaint, old-fashioned gold locket—an heirloom that might have come down from a grandmother's days—was dangling from a gold chain that encircled the girl's neck. Apparently she caught a finger in the chain and before she could free it she had given a sharp tug at the chain, thereby lifting the locket from where it rested against the white flesh of its wearer's throat.

"I—I'm afraid I can't play," Miss Ballister almost gasped out the words; then drawing in her breath with a sharp catch: "This room—it's so warm. I feel a bit faint, really I do. Please untie me. I shan't be able to go on." Her voice, though pitched still in a low key, was sharpened with a nervous entreaty.

"I will of course if you really do feel badly," said Miss Smith. Then an inspiration seemed to come to her. Her eyes sparkled.

"Oh," she said, "I've a beautiful idea! We'll play an April Fools' joke on them. We'll make them all think you still are here and while they're dodging about trying to keep away from you we'll slip away together and be at the other end of the house." By a gesture

of one hand and with a finger of the other across her lips to impress the need of secrecy, she brought Mrs. Hadley-Smith into the little conspiracy.

"Don't blindfold yourself, Claire," she whispered. "You must help Miss Ballister and me to play a joke on the others. You are to keep the bells rattling after we are gone. See? This way."

With that she shifted the leathern loop from about Miss Ballister's neck and replaced it over Mrs. Hadley-Smith's head which bent forward to receive it. Smiling in appreciation of the proposed hoax the widow took a step or two.

"Watch!" whispered Miss Smith in Miss Ballister's ear. "See how well the trick works. There—what did I tell you?"

For instantly all the players, deceived by the artifice, were falling back, huddling away from the fancied danger zone as Mrs. Hadley-Smith went toward them. In the same instant Miss Smith silently had opened the nearest door and, beckoning to Miss Ballister to follow her, was tiptoeing softly out into the empty hall. The door closed gently behind them.

Miss Ballister laughed a forced little laugh. She turned, presenting her back to Miss Smith.

"Now untie me, please do." In her eagerness to be free she panted out the words.

"Surely," agreed Miss Smith. "But I think we should get entirely away, out of sight, before the bells stop ringing and the hoax begins to

dawn on them. There's a little study right here at the end of the hall. Shall we go there and hide from them? I'll relieve you of that handkerchief then."

"Yes, yes; but quickly, please!" Miss Ballister's note was insistent; you might call it pleading, certainly it was agitated. "Being tied this way gives one such a trapped sort of feeling—it's horrid, really it is. I'll never let any one tie my hands again so long as I live. It's enough to give one hysterics—honestly it is.

"I understand. Come on, then."

With one hand slipped inside the curve of the other's elbow Miss Smith hurried her to the study door masked beneath the broad stairs, and opening it, ushered her into the inner room.

It contained an occupant: a smallish man with mild-looking gray eyes, who at their entrance rose up from where he sat, staring steadily at them. At sight of the unexpected stranger Miss Ballister halted. She uttered a shocked little exclamation and recoiled, pulling away from her escort as though she meant to flee back across the threshold. But her shoulders came against the solid panels.

The door so soon had been shut behind her, cutting off retreat.

"Well?" said the stranger.

Miss Smith stood away from the shrinking figure, leaving it quite alone.

"This is the woman," she said, and suddenly

her voice was accusing and hard. "The stolen paper is in that necklace she is wearing round her neck."

For proof of the truth of the charge Mullinix had only to look into their captive's face. Her first little fit of distress coming on her so suddenly while she was being bound had made her pale. Now her pallor was ghastly. Little blemishes under the skin stood out in blotches against its dead white, and out of the mask her eyes glared in a dumb terror. She made no outcry, but her lips, stiff with fright, twisted to form words that would not come. Her shoulders heaved as—futilely—she strove to wrench her arms free. Then quickly her head sank forward and her knees began to bend under her.

"Mind—she's going to faint!" warned Mullinix.

Both of them sprang forward and together they eased the limp shape down upon the rug. She lay there at their feet, a pitiable little bundle. But there was no compassion, no mercifulness in their faces as they looked down at her.

Alongside the slumped form Miss Smith knelt down and felt for the clasp of the slender chain and undid it. She pressed the catch of the locket and opened it, and from the small receptacle revealed within, where a miniature might once have been, she took forth a tightly folded half sheet of yellow parchment paper,

which had it been wadded into a ball would have made a sphere about the size of the kernel of a fair-sized filbert.

Mullinix grasped it eagerly, pressed it out flat and took one glance at the familiar signature, written below the close-set array of seemingly meaningless and unrelated letters.

"You win, young lady," he said, and there was thanksgiving and congratulation in the way he said it. "But how did you do it? How was it done?"

She looked up from where she was casting off the binding about the relaxed hands of the unconscious culprit.

"It wasn't hard—after the hints you gave me. I made up my mind yesterday that the paper would probably be hidden in a piece of jewelry—in a bracelet or under the setting of a ring possibly; or in a hair ornament possibly; and I followed that theory. Two tests that I made convinced me that Madame Ybanca was innocent; they quite eliminated Madame Ybanca from the equation. So I centred my efforts on this girl and she betrayed herself soon enough."

"Betrayed herself, how?"

"An individual who has been temporarily deprived of sight will involuntarily keep his or her hands upon any precious object that is concealed about the person—I suppose you know that. And as I watched her after I had blindfolded her——"

"After you had what?"

"Blindfolded her. Oh, I kept my promise," she added, reading the expression on his face. "There was no force used, and no violence. She suffered herself to be blindfolded—indeed, I did the blinding myself. Well, after she had been blindfolded with a thick silk handkerchief I watched her, and I saw that while with one hand she groped her way about, she kept the other hand constantly clutched upon this locket, as though to make sure of the safety of something there. So then I was sure; but I was made doubly sure by her actions while I was tying her hands behind her. And then, after I had her tied and helpless, I could experiment further—and I did—and again my experiment convinced me I was on the right track."

"Yes—but tying her hands—didn't she resist that?"

"No; you see, she let me tie her hands too. It was a part of a game. They all played it."

"Some of the others were blinded, eh?"

"All of them were; every single one of them was. They still are, I imagine, providing my cousin is doing her part—and I am sure she is. There'll be no suspicion of the truth, even after their eyes are unhooded. Claire has her explanations all ready. They'll miss this girl of course and wonder what has become of her, but the explanation provides for that: She was taken with a sudden indisposition and slipped away with me, not wishing to spoil the fun by

staying on after she began to feel badly. That's the story they'll be told, and there's no reason why they shouldn't accept it as valid either. See! She's coming to."

"Then I'll get out and leave you to attend to her. Keep her here in this room until she's better, and then you may send her back to her hotel. You might tell her that there is to be no prosecution and no unpleasant notoriety for her if only she keeps her mouth shut about all that's happened. Probably she'll be only too glad to do that, for I figure she has learned a lesson."

"You won't want to question her, then, after she has been revived?"

"It's quite unnecessary. I have the other ends of the case in my hands. And besides I must go outside to meet our dear friend Geltmann when he arrives. He should be driving up to the house pretty soon—I had a telephone message five minutes ago telling me to expect him shortly. So I'm going out to break some sad news to him on the sidewalk. He doesn't know it yet, but he's starting to-night on a long, long trip; a trip that will take him clear out of this country—and he won't ever, ever be coming back.

"But I'll call on you to-morrow, if I may—after I've seen to getting him off for the West. I want to thank you again in behalf of the Service for the wonderful thing you've done so wonderfully well. And I want to hear more from you about that game you played."

"I'll do better than that," she promised: "I'll let you read about it in a book—an old secondhand book, it is; you saw it yesterday. Maybe I can convert you to reading old books; they're often full of things that people in your line should know."

"Lady," he said reverently, "you've made a true believer of me already."

CHAPTER IX

THE BULL CALLED EMILY

WE were sitting at a corner table in a certain small restaurant hard by where Sixth Avenue's L structure, like an overgrown straddlebug, wades through the restless currents of Broadway at a sharpened angle. The dish upon which we principally dined was called on the menu *Chicken a la Marengo*. We knew why. Marengo, by all accounts, was a mighty tough battle, and this particular chicken, we judged, had never had any refining influences in its ill-spent life. From its present defiant attitude in a cooked form we figured it had pipped the shell with a burglar's jimmy and joined the Dominecker Kid's gang before it shed its pin-feathers. There were two of us engaged in the fruitless attack upon its sinewy tissues—the present writer and his old un-law-abiding friend, —Scandalous Doolan.

For a period of minutes Scandalous wrestled with the thews of one of the embattled fowl's knee-joints. After a struggle in which the

honours stood practically even, he laid down his knife and flirted a thumb toward a bottle of peppery sauce which stood on my side of the table.

"Hey, bo," he requested, "pass the liniment, will you? This sea gull's got the rheumatism."

The purport of the remark, taken in connection with the gesture which accompanied it, was plain enough to my understanding; but for the nonce I could not classify the idiom in which Scandalous couched his request. It could not be Underworld jargon; it was too direct and at the same time too picturesque. Moreover, the Underworld, as a rule, concerns itself only with altering such words and such expressions as strictly figure in the business affairs of its various crafts and pursuits. Nor to me did it sound like the language of the circus-lot, for in such case it probably would have been more complex. So by process of elimination I decided it was of the slang code of the burlesque and vaudeville stage, with which, as with the other two, Scandalous had a thorough acquaintance. I felt sure, then, that something had set his mind to working backward along the memory-grooves of some one or another of his earlier experiences in the act-producing line of endeavour, and that, with proper pumping, a story might be forthcoming. As it turned out, I was right.

"Where did you get that one, Scandalous?" I asked craftily. "Your own coinage, or did you borrow it from somebody else?"

He only grinned cryptically. After a bit he hailed the attendant waiter, who because he plainly suffered from fallen arches had already been rechristened by Scandalous as Battling Insteps.

"Say, Battling," he said, "take away the emu; he's still the undefeated champion of the ages. Tidy him up a little and serve him to the next guy that feels like he needs exercise more'n he does nourishment. The gravy may be mussed up a trifle, but the old ring-general ain't lost an ounce. I fought him three rounds and didn't put a bruise on him."

"Couldn't I bring you somethin' else?" said the waiter. "The Wiener Schnitzel with noodles is very——"

"Nix," said Scandalous; "if the cassowary licked us, what chance would we stand against the bison? That'll be all for the olio; I'll go right into the after-show now. Slip me a dipper of straight chicory and one of those Flor de Boiled Dinners, and then you can break the bad news to my pal here." By this I knew he meant that he craved a cup of black coffee and one of the domestic cigars to which he was addicted, and that I could pay the check.

He turned to me:

"How're you goin' to finish your turn?" he asked. "They've got mince pie here like Mother Emma Goldman used to make. Only you want to be careful it don't explode in your hand."

I shook my head. "I'll nibble at these," I said, "until you get through." And I reached for a little saucer of salted peanuts that lurked in the shadow of the bowl containing the olives and the celery. For this, you should know, was a table d'hôte establishment, and no such place is complete without its drowned olives and its wilted celery.

"Speaking of peanuts," he said, "I don't seem to care deeply for such. I lost my taste for them dainties quite some time back."

"What was the occasion?" I prompted, for I saw the light of reminiscence smouldering in his eye.

"It wasn't no occasion," he said; "it was a catastrophe. Did I ever happen to tell you about the time I furnished the financial backing for Windy Jordan and his educated bull, and what happened when the blow-off came?"

I shook my head and in silence hearkened.

"It makes quite an earful," he continued. "Business for gents in my profession was very punk here on the Main Stem that season. By reason of the dishonest police it was mighty hard for an honest grafter to make a living. It certainly was depressing to trim an Ezra for his roll and then have to cut up the net proceeds with so many central-office guys that you had to go back and borrow car-fare from the sucker to get home on. Besides, I was somewhat lonely and low in my peace of mind on account of my regular side-kick the Sweet Caps Kid

being in the hospital. He'd made the grievous mistake of trying to sell a half-interest in the Aquarium to a visiting Swede. Right in the middle of the negotiations something came up that made the Swede doubtful that all was not well, and he betrayed his increasing misgivings by hauling out a set of old-fashioned genuine antique brass knucks and nicking up Sweet Caps' scalp to such an extent my unfortunate companion had to spend three weeks on the flat of his back in the casualty ward, with a couple of doctors coming in every morning to replace the divots. Pending his recovery, I was sort of figuring on visiting Antioch, Gilead, Zion and other religious towns up State with a view of selling the haymakers some Bermuda oats for their fall planting, when along came Windy Jordan and broached a proposition.

"This here Windy Jordan was one of them human draughts; hence the name. At all hours there was a strong breeze blowing out of him in the form of words. If he wasn't conversing, it was a sign he had acute sore throat. But to counteract that fault he was the sole proprietor of the smartest and the largest bull on this side of the ocean, which said bull answered to the name of Emily."

"Did you say a bull?" I asked.

"Sure I said a bull. Why not? Ain't you wise to what a bull is?"

"Certainly I am, but a bull named Emily——"

"Listen, little one: To them that follow

after the red wagon and the white top, all elephants is bulls, disregardless of genders, just the same as all regular bulls is he-cows to refined maiden ladies residin' in New England and points adjacent. Only, show-people ain't got any false modesty that way. In the show-business a bull is a bull, whether it's a lady-bull or a gentleman-bull. So very properly this here bull, being one of the most refined and cultured members of her sex, answers to the Christian name of Emily.

"Well, this Emily is not only the joy and the pride of Windy Jordan's life, but she's his entire available assets. Bull and bulline, she'd been with him from early childhood. In fact, Windy was the only parent Emily ever knew, she having been left a helpless orphan on account of a railroad wreck to the old Van Orten shows back yonder in eighteen-eighty-something. So Windy, he took her as a prattling infant in arms when she didn't weigh an ounce over a ton and a half, and he adopted her and educated her and pampered her and treated her as a member of his own family, only better, until she repaid him by becoming not only the largest bull in the business but the most highly cultivated.

"Emily knew nearly everything there was to know, and what she didn't know she suspected very strongly. Likewise, as I came to find out later, she was extremely grateful for small favours and most affectionate by nature. To be sure, being affectionate with a bull about the

size and general specifications of a furniture-car had its drawbacks. She was liable to lean up against you in a playful, kittenish kind of a way, and cave in most of your ribs. It was like having a violent flirtation with a landslide to venture up clost to Emily when she was in one of her tomboy moods. I've know' her to nudge a friend with one of her front elbows and put both his shoulder-blades out of socket. But she never meant no harm by it, never. It was just a little way she had.

"It seems like Windy and Emily were aiming to join out that season with a tent-show, but the deal fell through some way, and for the past few weeks Windy had been infesting a lodging-house for members of the profession over here on East Eleventh Street, and Emily had been in a livery barn down in Greenwich Village, just naturally eating her old India-rubber head off. Windy, having run low as to coin, wasn't able to pay up Emily's back board, and the liveryman was holding her for the bill.

"So, hearing some way that I'm fairly well upholstered with currency, he comes to me and suggests that if I'll dig up what's necessary to get Emily out of hock, he can snare a line of bookings in vaudeville, and we'll all three go out on the two-a-day together, him as trainer and me as manager and Emily as the principal attraction. The proceeds is to be cut up fifty-fifty as between me and him.

"The notion don't sound like such a bad one.

That was back in the days when refined vaudeville was running very strongly to trained-animal acts and leading ladies that had quit leading but hadn't found out about it yet. Nowadays them ex-queens of tragedy can go into the movies and draw down so much money that if they only get half as much as they say they're getting, they're getting almost twice as much as anybody would give 'em; but them times, vaudeville was their one best bet. And next to emotional actrines who could emosh twicet daily for twenty minutes on a stretch, without giving way anywhere, a good trained-animal turn had the call. It might be a troupe of educated Potomac shad or an educated ape or a city-broke Gila monster or a talking horse or what not. In our case 'twas Emily, the bull.

"First thing, we goes down to the livery-stable where Emily is spending the Indian summer and consuming half her weight in dry provender every twenty-four hours. The proprietor of this here fodder-emporium is named McGuire, and when I tells him I'm there to settle Emily's account in full, he carries on as though entirely overcome by joyfulness—not that he's got any grudge against Emily, understand, but for other good and abundant sufficiencies. He states that so far as Emily's personal conduct is concerned, during her enforced sojourn in his midst, she's always deported herself like a perfect lady. But she takes up an awful lot of room, and one of the

hands is now on the verge of nervous prostration from overexertions incurred in packing hay to her, and it seems she's addicted to nightmares. She gets to dreaming that a mouse nearly an inch and a half long is after her,—all bulls is terrible afraid, you know, that some day a mouse is going to come along and eat 'em,—and when she has them kind of delusions, she cries out in her sleep and tosses around and maybe knocks down a couple of steel beams or busts in a row of box-stalls or something trivial like that. Then, right on top of them petty annoyances, McGuire some days previous has made the mistake of feeding Emily peanuts, which peanuts, as he then finds out, is her favourite tidbit.

"'Gents,' says McGuire to me and Windy Jordan, 'I shore did make the error of my life when I done that act of kindness. I merely meant them peanuts as a special treat, but Emily figures it out that they're the start of a fixed habit,' he says. 'Ever since then, if I forget to bring her in her one five-cent bag of peanuts per diem, per day, she calls personally to inquire into the oversight. She waits very patient and ladylike until about eleven o'clock in the morning, and if I ain't made good by then, she just pulls up her leg hobble by the roots and drops in on me to find out what's the meaning of the delay.

"'She ain't never rough nor overbearing, but it interferes with trade for me to be sitting here

in my office at the front of the stable talking business with somebody, and all of a sudden the front half of the largest East Indian elephant in the world shoves three or four thousand pounds of herself in at that side door and begins waving her trunk around in the air, meanwhile uttering fretful, complaining sounds. I've lost two or three customers that way,' he says. 'They get right up and go away sudden,' he says, 'and they don't never come back no more, not even for their hats and umbrellas. They send for 'em.

"'That ain't the worst of it,' he says. 'Yesterday,' he says, 'I rented out my whole string of coaches and teams for a burial turnout over here on McDougal Street. Being as it's a big occasion, I'm driving the first carriage containing the sorrowing family of deceased. Naturally, with a job like that on my hands, I don't think about Emily at all; my mind's all occupied up with making the affair pass off in a tasty and pleasant fashion for all concerned. Well, the cortege is just leaving the late residence of the remainders, when around the corner comes bulging Emily, followed at a suitable distance by eight or nine thousand of the populace. She's missed me, and she wants her peanuts, and she's been trailing me; and now, by heck, she's found me.

"'Emily gives a loud, glad snort of recognition, wheels herself around and then falls in alongside the front hack and gets ready to

accompany us, all the time poking her snout over at me and uttering plaintive remarks in East Indian to me. Gents,' he says, 'you can see for yourselves, a thing like that, occurring right at the beginning of a funeral procession, is calculated to distract popular attention away from the main attraction. Under the circumstances I wouldn't blame no corpse on earth for feeling jealous—let alone a popular and prominent corpse like this here one was, a party that had been a district leader at Tammany Hall in his day, and after that the owner of the most fashionable retail liquor store in the entire neighbourhood, and who's now riding along with solid silver handles up and down both sides, and style just wrote all over him. Here, with an utter disregard for expense, he's putting on all this dog for his last public appearance, and a strange elephant comes along and grabs the show right away from him.

"'The bereaved family don't care for it, neither. I gathers as much from the remarks they're making out of the windows of the coach. But Emily just won't take a hint. She sticks along until I stops the procession and goes in a guinea fruitstore on the next block and buys her a bag of peanuts. That's all she wants. She takes it, and she leaves us and goes on back to the stable.

"'But, as the feller says, it practically ruined the entire day for them berefts. I lost their patronage right there—and them a nice sickly

family, too. A lot of the friends and relatives also resented it; they were telling me so all the way back from the cemet'ry. There ain't no real harm in Emily, and I've got powerfully attached to her, but taking one thing with another, I ain't regretting none that you've come down all organised financially to take her out of pawn. You have my best wishes, and so has she.'

"So we settles up the account to date, which the same makes quite a nick in the bank-roll, and then we goes back to the rear of the stable where Emily is quartered, and she falls on Windy's neck, mighty nigh dislocating it, and he introduces me to Emily, and we shakes hands together,—I means trunks,—and then Windy unshackles her, and she follows us along just as gentle as a kitten to them freight-yards over on Tenth Avenue where her future travelling home is waiting for her. It's a box-car, with one end rigged up with bunks as a boudoir for me and Windy, and the rest of it fitted out as a private stateroom for Emily.

"From that time on, for quite a spell, we're just the same as one big happy family, as we goes a-jauntily touring from place to place.

"We're playin' the Big Time, which means week stands and no hard jumps. Emily's a hit, a knock-out and a riot wherever she appears. She knows it too, but success don't go to her head, and she don't never get no attacks of this here complaint which they calls temper'ment.

I always figgered out that temper'ment, when a grand wopra singster has it, is just plain old temper when it afflicts a bricklayer. I don't know what form it would take if it should seize on a bull, but Emily appears to be absolutely immune. Give her a ton of hay and one sack of peanuts a day, and she's just as placid as a great gross of guinea pigs. Behind the scenes she never makes no trouble, but chums with the stage-hands and even sometimes with the actors, thus proving that she ain't stuck up.

"When the time comes for Emily to do her turn, she just goes ambling on behind Windy and cuts up more didoes than any trick-mule that ever lived. She smokes a pipe, and she toots on a brass horn, and waits on table while Windy pretends to eat, and stands on her head, and plays baseball with him and so forth and so on, for fifteen minutes, winding up by waving the Amurikin flag over her head. But all this time she's keeping one eye on me, where I'm standing in the wings with a sack of peanuts in my pocket waiting for her to come off. Every time she works over toward my side of the stage, she makes little hoydenish remarks to me in her native language. It ain't long until I can make out everything she says. I've been pedling the bull too long not to be able to understand it when spoke by a native.

"For upwards of two months things goes along just beautiful. Then we strikes a town out in Illinois where business ain't what it used to be,

if indeed it ever was. Along about the middle of the week the young feller that's doing the press-work for the house comes to me and asks me if I ain't got an idea in my system that might make a good press-stunt.

"There's an inspiration comes to me and I suggests to him that maybe he might go ahead and make an announcement that following the Saturday matinêe, Emily the Pluperfect, Ponderous, Pachydermical Performer, direct from the court of the reigning Roger of Simla County, India, will hold a reception on the stage to meet her little friends, each and every one of whom will be expected to bring her a bag of peanuts.

"'That listens all right,' says this lad, 'providing she likes peanuts.'

"'Providing she likes 'em?' I says. 'Son,' I says, 'if that bull ever has to take the cure for the drug-habit, it'll be on account of peanuts. If you don't think she likes peanuts, a dime will win you a trip to the Holy Lands,' I says. 'Why,' I says, 'Emily's middle name is *Peanuts*. Offhand,' I says, 'I don't know precisely how many peanuts there are,' I says, 'because if I ever heard the exact figures, I've forgot 'em, but I'd like to lay you a little eight to five that Emily can chamber all the peanuts in the world and then set down right where she happens to be, to wait for next year's crop to come onto the market. That's how much she cares for peanuts,' I says.

"Well, that convinces him, and he hurries

off to write his little piece about Emily's peanut reception. The next day, which is Friday, the announcement is in both the papers. Saturday after lunch when I strolls round to the show-shop for the matinêe, one glance around the corner from the stage entrance proves to me that our little social function is certainly starting out to be a success. The street in front is lined on both sides with dagos with peanut-stands, selling peanuts to the population as fast as they can pass 'em out; and there's a long line, mainly kids, at the box-office. I goes on in and takes a flash at the front of the house through the peephole in the curtain, and the place is already jam full. If there's one kid out there, there's a thousand, and every tiny tot has got a sack of peanuts clutched in his or her chubby fist, as the case may be. And say, listen: there's a smell in the air like a prairie fire running through a Georgia goober-king's plantation.

"I goes back to where Emily is hitched, and she's weaving to and fro on her legs and watering at the mouth until she just naturally can't control her own riparian rights. She's done smelt that smell too.

"'Honey gal,' I says to her, 'it shore looks to me like you're due to get your fullupances of the succulential ground-pea of the Sunny Southland this day.'

"She's so grateful she tries to kiss me, but I ducks. All through her turn she dribbles from

the chin like a defective fire-hydrant, and I can tell that she ain't got her mind on her business. She's too busy thinking about peanuts. When she's got through and taken her bows, the manager leaves the curtain up and Emily steps back behind a rope that a couple of the hands stretches acrosst the stage, with me standing on one side of her and Windy on the other; and then a couple more hands shoves a wooden runway acrosst the orchestra rail down into one of the side aisles; and then the house-manager invites Emily's young friends to march up the runway and crosst over from left to right, handing out their freewill offerings to her as they pass.

"During this pleasant scene, as the manager explains, Emily's dauntless owner, the world-famous Professor Zendavesta Jordan, meaning Windy, will lecture on the size, dimensions, habits and quaint peculiarities of this wondrous creature. That last part suits Windy right down to the ground, him being, as I told you before, the kind of party who's never so happy as when he's started his mouth and gone away and left it running.

"For maybe a half a minute after the house-manager finishes his little spiel, the kids sort of hang back. Then the rush starts; and take it from me, little one, it's some considerable rush. Here they come up that runway—tiny tots in blue, and tiny tots in red, and tiny tots in white; tiny tots with their parents, guardians or nurses,

and tiny tots without none; tiny tots that are beginning to outgrow the tiny tottering stage, and other varieties of tiny tots too numerous to mention. And clutched in each and every tiny tot's chubby hand is a bag of peanuts, five-cent size or ten-cent size, but mostly five-cent size. As Emily sees 'em coming, she smiles until she looks in the face like one of these here old-fashioned red-brick Colonial fireplaces, with an overgrown black Christmas stocking hanging down from the centre of the mantel.

"Up comes the first and foremost of the tiny tots. The Santy Claus stocking reaches out and annexes the free-will offering. There's a faint crunching sound; that there sack of peanuts has went to the bourne from out which no peanut, up until that time, has ever been known to return; and Emily is smiling benevolently and reaching out for the next sack. And behind the second kid is the third kid, and behind the third kid still more kids, and as far as the human eye can reach, there ain't nothing on the horizon of that show-shop but just kids—kids and peanuts.

"It certainly was a beauteous spectacle to behold so many of the dear little ones advancing up that runway with peanuts. To myself I says: 'I guess I'm a bad little suggester, eh, what? Here's Emily getting all this free provender and Windy talking his fool head off and the house getting all this advertising and none of us out a cent for any part of it.'

"In about ten minutes, though, I'm struck by the fact that Emily's original outburst of enthusiasm appears slightly on the wane. It seems to me she ain't reaching out for the free-will offerings with quite so much eagersomeness as she was displaying a spell back. Also I takes notice that the wrinkles in her tum-tum are filling out so that she's beginning to lose some of that deflated or punctured look so common amongst bulls.

"Still, I don't have no apprehensions, but thinks to myself that any bull which can eat half a ton of hay for breakfast certainly is competent to take in a couple of wagon-loads of peanuts for five o'clock tea. Even at that I figgers that it won't do no harm to coach Emily along a little.

"'Go to it, baby mine,' I says to her. 'You ain't hardly started. Here's a chance,' I says, 'to establish a new world's record for peanuts.'

"That remark appears to spur her up for a minute or so, but something seems to keep on warning me that her heart ain't in the work to the extent it has been. Windy don't see nothing out of the way, he being congenially engaged in shooting off his face, but I'm more or less concerned by certain mighty significant facts. For one thing, Emily ain't eatin' sacks and all any more; she's emptying the peanuts out and throwing the paper bags aside. Likewise her work ain't clean and smooth like it was. Her underlip is swinging down, and she's

beginning to drool loose goobers off the lower end of it, and her low but intelligent forehead is all furrowed up as if with deep thought.

"Observing all of which, I says to myself, I says: 'If ever Emily should start to cramp, the world's cramping record is also in a fair way to be busted this afternoon. I certainly do hope,' I says, 'that Emily don't go and get herself overextended.'

"You see, I'm trusting for the best, because I realises that it wouldn't do to call off the reception right in the middle of it on account of the disappointment amongst the tiny tots that ain't passed in review yet and the general ill-feeling that's sure to follow.

"I should say about two hundred tiny tots have gone by, with maybe five hundred more still in line waiting their turn, when there halts in front of Emily a fancy-dressed tiny tot which he must've been the favourite tiny tot of the richest man in town, because he's holding in his hands a bag of peanuts fully a foot deep. It couldn't of cost a cent less'n half a dollar, that bag. Emily reaches for the contribution, fondles it for a second or two and starts to upend it down her throat; and then with a low, sad, hopeless cry she drops it on the stage and sort of shrugs her front legs forward and stands there with her head bent and her ears twitching same as if she's listening for something that's still a long ways off but coming closter fast. And at that precise instant I sees the first

cramp start from behind her right-hand shoulder-blade and begin to work south. Say, it was just like being present at the birth of an earthquake.

"Moving slow and deliberate, Emily turns around in her tracks, shivering all over, and then I sees the cramp ripple along until it reaches her cargo-hold and strikes inward. It lifts all four of her feet clean off the floor, and when she comes down again, she comes down travelling. There's some scenery in her way, and some furniture and props and one thing and other, but she don't trouble to go round 'em. She goes through 'em, as being a more simple and direct way, and a minute later she steps out through the stage entrance into the crowded marts of trade with half of a centre door fancy hung around her neck. Me and Windy is trailing along, urging her to be ca'm but keeping at a reasonably safe distance while doing so. Behind us as we comes forth we can hear the voices of many tiny tots upraised in skeered cries.

"Being a Saturday afternoon, the business section is fairly well crowded with people, and I suppose it's only natural that the unexpected appearance upon the main street of the largest bull in captivity, wearing part of a cottage set for a collar and making sounds through her snout like a switch-engine in distress, should cause some surprised comment amongst the populace. In fact, I should say the surprised

comment might of been heard for fully half a mile away.

"Emily hesitates as she reaches the sidewalk, as though she ain't decided yet in her own mind just where she'll go, and then her agonised eye falls on all them peanut-roasters standing in a double row alongside the curbings on both sides of the street. The Italian and Greek gents who owns 'em are already departing hence in a hurried manner, but they've left their outfits behind, and right away it's made plain to me by her actions that Emily regards the sight as a part of a general conspiracy to feed her some peanuts when she already has more peanuts than what she really required for personal use. She reaches out for the first peanut-machine in the row, curls her trunk around it and slams it against a brick wall so hard that it immediately begins to look something like a flivver car which has been in a severe collision and something like a tin accordion that's had hard treatment from a careless owner. With this for a beginning, Emily starts in to get real rough with them roasters. For about three minutes it's rainin' hot charcoal and hot peanuts and wooden wheels and metal cranks and sheet-iron drums all over that part of the fair city.

"Having put the enemy's batteries out of commission, Emily now swings around and heads back in the opposite direction with everybody giving her plenty of room. I heard

afterward that some citizens went miles out of their way in order to give her room. Emily's snout is aimed straight up as though she's craving air, and her tail is standing straight out behind, stiff as a poker except that about every few seconds a painful quiver runs through it from the end that's nearest Emily to the end that's furtherest away from her. Windy is hoofing it along about fifty feet back of her, uttering soothing remarks and entreating her to listen to reason, and I'm trailing Windy; but for oncet Emily don't hearken none to her master's voice.

"Out of the tail of my eye I see a fat lady start to faint, and when she's right in the middle of the faint, change her mind about it and do a back flip into a plumber's shop, the purtiest you ever seen. I see a policeman dodge out from behind a lamp-post as Emily approaches, and reach for his gun. I yells to him not to shoot, but it's unnecessary advice, because he's only chucking his hardware away so's to lighten him up for a couple of hundred yards of straightaway sprinting. I see Emily make a side-swipe with her nozzle at a stout gent who's in the act of climbing a telegraph-pole hand over hand. She misses the seat of his pants by a fraction of an inch, and as he reaches the first cross-arm out of her reach, and drapes his form acrosst it, the reason for her sudden animosity towards him is explained. A glass jar falls out of one of his hip pockets and is dashed to fragments on

the cruel bricks far below, and its contents is then seen to be peanut butter.

"I sees these things as if in a troubled dream, and then, all of a sudden, me and Emily are all alone in a deserted city. Exceptin' for us two, there ain't a soul in sight nowheres. Even Windy has mysteriously vanished. And now Emily, in passing along, happens to look inside a fruit-store, and through the window her unhappy glance rests upon a bin full of peanuts. So she just presses her face against the pane like *Little Mary* in the po'm, and at that the entire front end of that establishment seems to give away in a very simultaneous manner, and Emily reaches in through the orifices and plucks out the contents of that there store, including stock, fixtures and good will, and throws 'em backward over her shoulder in a petulant and hurried way. But I takes notice that she throws the bin of peanuts much farther than the grapefruit or the pineapples or the glass show-cases containing the stick candy. The proprietor must of been down in the cellar at the moment, else I judge she'd of fetched him forth too.

"Thus we continues on our way, me and Emily, in the midst of a vast but boisterous solitude,—for while we can't see the inhabitants, we can hear 'em,—until we arrive at the foot of Main Street, and there we beholds the railroad freight-depot looming before us. I can tell that Emily is wishful to pass through

this structure. There ain't no opening on the nigh side of it, but that don't hinder Emily none. She gives one heave with her shoulders and makes a door and passes on in and out again on the far side by the same methods. I arrives around the end of the shed just in time to see her slide down a steep grade through somebody's truck-garden and sink down upon her heaving flank in a little hollow. As I halts upon the brow of the hill, she looks up at me very reproachful, and I can see that her prevalent complexion is beginning to turn awful wan and pale. Son, take it from me, when a full-grown she-bull gets wan, she's probably the wannest thing there is in the world.

"'Stand back, Scandalous,' she moans to me in bull-language. 'I don't bear you no grudge, —it was a mistake in judgment on the part of all of us,—but stand back and give me room. Up till this time,' she says, 'I've been po'rly, but something seems to tell me that now I'm about to be what you might call real indisposed.'

"Which she certainly was.

"So, after a while, a part of the police force come along, stepping slow and cautious, and they halts themselves in the protecting shadows of the freight-shed or what's left of it, and they beckon me to come near 'em, and when I responds, they tell me I'm under arrest for inciting riots and disturbances and desecration of property and various other crimes and misdemeanours. I suggests to 'em that if they're

really craving to arrest anybody, they should oughter begin with Emily, but they don't fall in with the idea. They marches me up to the police-station, looking over their shoulders at frequent intervals to be sure the anguished Emily ain't coming too, and when we get there, I find Windy in the act of being forcibly detained in the front office.

"Immediately after I arrived, the payoff started and continued unabated for quite a period of time. First we settled in full with the late proprietors of them defunct peanut-roasting machines; and then the owner of the wrecked fruitstore, and the man that owned the opera-house, and the stout lady who'd fainted from the waist up but was now entirely recovered, and the fleshy gent who'd climbed the telegraph-pole, and the railroad agent and some several hundred others who had claims for property damage or mental anguish or shockages to their nervous systems or shortage of breath or loss of trade or other injuries—all these were in line, waiting.

"We was reduced to a case ten-spot before the depot agent, who came last, lined up for his'n; but he took one good look and said he wouldn't be a hog about it—we could keep that ten-specker, and he'd be satisfied just to take over our private car in consideration of the loss inflicted by Emily to his freight-shed. I was trying to tell him how much we appreciated his kindness, but the chief of police wouldn't let me

finish—said he couldn't permit that kind of language to be used in a police-station, said it might corrupt the morals of some of his young policemen.

"So everything passed off very pleasant and satisfactory at the police-station, but Emily spent the evening and the ensuing night right where she was, voicing her regrets at frequent intervals. Along toward morning she felt easier, although sadly depleted in general appearance, and about daylight her and Windy bid me good-by and went off acrosst-country afoot, aiming to catch up with Ringbold Brothers' circus, which was reported to be operating somewhere in that vicinity. As for me, I'd had enough for the time being of the refined amusement business. I took my half of that lone sawbuck which was all that was left to us from our frittered and dissipated fortunes, and I started east, travelling second class and living very frugally on the way. And that was about all that happened, worthy of note, with the exception of a violent personal dispute occurring between me and a train-butch coming out of Ashtabula."

"What was the cause?" I asked as Scandalous stood up and smoothed down his waistcoat.

"I had just one thin dime left," said Scandalous, "and I explained my predicament to the butch, saying as how I wanted what was the most filling thing he had for the price—and he offered me a sack of peanuts!"

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